THE MOUNTAINEERS

HAROLD · BINDLOSS

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HAROLD BINDLOSS

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THE MOUNTAINEERS

I

JIMMY SIGNS A NOTE

THE small room at the Canadian hotel was hot and smelt of cigar-smoke and liquor. Stannard put down his cards, shrugged resignedly, and opened the window. Deering smiled and pulled a pile of paper money across the table. He was strongly built and belonged to a mountaineering club, but he was fat and his American dinner jacket looked uncomfortably tight.

Deering's habit was to smile, and Jimmy Leyland had liked his knowing twinkle. Somehow it hinted that you could not cheat Deering, but if you were his friend you could trust him, and he would see you out. Now, however, Jimmy thought he grinned. Jimmy had reckoned on winning the pool, but Deering had picked up the money he imagined was his.

Jackson wiped a spot of liquor from his white shirt and gave the boy a sympathetic glance. Jackson was thin, dark-skinned and grave, and although he did not talk much about himself, Jimmy understood he was rather an important

gentleman in Carolina. Stannard had indicated something like this. Stannard and Jimmy were frankly English, but Jimmy was young and the other's hair was touched by white.

Yet Stannard was athletic, and at Parisian clubs and Swiss hotels men talked about his fencing and his exploits on the rocks. He was not a big man, but now his thin jacket was open, the moulding of his chest and the curve to his black silk belt were Greek. All the same, one rather got a sense of cultivation than strength; Stannard looked thoroughbred, and Jimmy was proud he was his friend.

Jimmy was not cultivated. He was a careless, frank and muscular English lad, but he was not altogether raw, because he knew London and Paris and had for some time enjoyed Stannard's society. His manufacturing relations in Lancashire thought him an extravagant fool, and perhaps had grounds for doing so, for since Jimmy had broken their firm control his prudence was not marked.

"I must brace up. Let's stop for a few minutes," he said and went to the window.

The room was on the second floor, and the window opening on top of the veranda, commanded the valley. Across the terrace in front of the hotel, dark pines rolled down to the river, and the water sparkled in the moon. On the other side a belt of mist floated about the mountain slope and dark rocks went up and melted in the snow. The broken white line ran far North and was lost in the distance. One smelt the sweet resinous scents the soft Chinook wind blew across the wilderness.

Jimmy's glance rested on the river and the vague blue-white field of ice from which the green flood sprang. Now the electric elevators had stopped, the angry current's measured throb rolled across the pines. But for this, all was very quiet, and the other windows opening on the veranda were blank. Jimmy remembered the hotel manager himself had some time since firmly put out the billiard-room lights, when Jimmy was about ten dollars up at pool. He had afterwards won a much larger sum at cards, but his luck had begun to turn.

By and by Stannard came out and jumped on the high top rail. The light from the window touched his face, and his profile, cutting against the dark, was good and firmly lined. His balance on the narrow rail was like a boy's.

"If you carried my weight, you wouldn't get up like that. Two hundred pounds wants some moving," Deering remarked with a noisy laugh.

"I've known you move about an icy slope pretty fast," said Stannard, and taking his hands from the rail, pulled out his watch. "Two o'clock!" he resumed and gave Jimmy a smile. "I rather think you ought to go to bed. You have not got Deering's steadiness and are still a few dollars up. To stop when your luck is good is a useful plan."

"My legs are steadier than my head," Deering rejoined. "When I played the ten-spot Jimmy saw my game. Cost me five dollars. I reckon I ought to go to bed!"

Jimmy frowned. He was persuaded he was sober,

and although Stannard was a very good sort, sometimes his fatherly admonition jarred. Then he had won a good sum from Stannard and must not be shabby. The strange thing was he could not remember how much he had won.

"To stop as soon as my luck turns is not my plan," he said. "I feel I owe you a chance to get your own back."

"Oh, well! If you feel like that, we had better go on; but your fastidiousness may cost you something," Stannard remarked, and Deering hit Jimmy's back.

"You're a sport; I like you! Play up and play straight's your rule."

Jimmy was flattered, although he doubted Deering's soberness. He did play straight, and when he won he did not go off with a walletful of his friends' money. All the same, Jackson's bored look annoyed him, since it rather indicated that he was willing to indulge Jimmy than that he noted his scrupulous fairness. Jimmy resolved to banish the fellow's languor, and when they went back to the card table demanded that they put up the stakes. Jackson agreed resignedly, and they resumed the game.

The room got hotter and the cigar-smoke was thick. Sometimes Stannard went to the ice-pail and mixed a cooling drink. Jimmy meant to use caution, but his luck had turned, and excitement parched his mouth. By and by Stannard, who was dealing, stopped.

"Your play is wild, Jimmy," he remarked. "I think you have had enough."

Jimmy turned to the others. His face was red and his gesture boyishly theatrical.

"I play for sport, not for dollars. I don't want your money, and now you're getting something back, we'll put up the bets again."

"Then, since your wad is nearly gone, somebody must keep the score," said Jackson, and Stannard pulled out his pocket book.

Jimmy took another drink and tried to brace up.

His luck, like his roll of bills, was obviously gone, but when he was winning the others had not stopped, and he did not want them, so to speak, to let him off. When he lost he could pay. But this was not important, and he must concentrate on his cards. The cards got worse and as a rule the ace he thought one antagonist had was played by another. At length Stannard pushed back his chair from the table.

"Three o'clock and I have had enough," he said, and turned to Jimmy. "Do you know how much you are down?"

Jimmy did not know, but he imagined the sum was large, and when Stannard began to reckon he went to the window. Day was breaking and mist rolled about the pines. The snow was grey and the high rocks were blurred and dark. Jimmy heard the river and the wind in the trees. The cold braced him and he vaguely felt the landscape's austerity. His head was getting steadier, and perhaps it was the contrast, but when he turned and looked about the room he was conscious of something like disgust. Stannard, occupied with

his pencil, knitted his brows, and now his graceful carelessness was not marked; Jimmy thought his look hard and calculating. Yet Stannard was his friend and model. He admitted he was highly strung and perhaps his imagination cheated him.

He was not cheated about the others. Now a reaction from the excitement had begun, he saw Deering and Jackson as he had not seen them before. Deering's grin was sottish, the fellow was grossly fat, and he fixed his greedy glance on Stannard's pocket book. Jackson, standing behind Stannard, studied the calculations, as if he meant to satisfy himself the sum was correct. Jimmy thought them impatient to know their share and their keenness annoyed him. Then Stannard put up his book.

"It looks as if your resolve to play up was rash," he remarked, and stated the sum Jimmy owed. "Can you meet the reckoning?"

"You know I'm broke. You're my banker and must fix it for me."

Stannard nodded. "Very well! What about your bet in the billiard-room?"

"Nothing about it. I made the stroke."

Deering grinned indulgently, and when Jackson shrugged, Jimmy's face got red.

"If they're not satisfied, give them the lot; I don't dispute about things like that," he said haughtily. "Write an acknowledgment for all I owe and I'll sign the note."

Stannard wrote and tore the leaf from his pocket book, but he now used a fountain pen. Jimmy

took the pen, signed the acknowledgment and went off. When he had gone Deering looked at Stannard and laughed.

"Your touch is light, but if the boy begins to feel your hand he'll kick. Anyhow, I'll take my wad."

Stannard gave him a roll of paper money and turned to Jackson.

"I'll take mine," said Jackson. "In the morning I pull out."

"You stated you meant to stop for a time."

"There's nothing in the game for me, and I don't see what Deering expects to get," said Jackson in a languid voice. "I doubt if you'll keep him long; the boys in his home section, on the coast, reckon he puts up a square deal. Anyhow, you can't have my help."

Stannard gave him a searching glance and Deering straightened his big body. Jackson's glance was quietly scornful.

"A hundred dollars is a useful sum, but my mark's higher, and I play with men. Maybe I'll meet up with some rich tourists at the Banff hotels," he resumed, and giving the others a careless nod, went off.

"A queer fellow, but sometimes his mood is nasty," said Deering. "I felt I'd like to throw him over the rails."

"As a rule, his sort carry a gun," Stannard remarked.

Deering wiped some liquor from the table, picked up Jimmy's glass, which was on the floor, and put away the cards.

" In the morning you had better give the China boy two dollars," he said in a meaning voice, and when he went to the door Stannard put out the light.

II

JIMMY'S APOLOGY

IN the morning Jimmy leaned, rather moodily, against the terrace wall. There was no garden, for the hotel occupied a narrow shelf on the hillside, and from the terrace one looked down on the tops of dusky pines. The building was new, and so far the guests were not numerous, but the manager claimed that when the charm of the neighbourhood was known, summer tourists and mountaineers would have no use for Banff.

Perhaps his hopefulness was justified, for all round the hotel primeval forest met untrodden snow, and at the head of the valley a glacier dropped to a calm green lake. A few miles south was a small flag-station, and sometimes one heard a heavy freight train rumble in the woods. When the distant noise died away all was very quiet but for the throb of falling water.

Jimmy had not enjoyed his breakfast, and when he lighted a cigarette the tobacco did not taste good. He admitted that he had been carried away, and now he was cool he reflected that his rashness had cost him a large sum and he had given Stannard another note. He was young, and had for a

year or two indulged his youthful craving for excitement, but he began to doubt if he could keep it up. After all, he had inherited more than he knew from his sternly business-like and rather parsimonious ancestors. Although the Leyland cotton mills were now famous in Lancashire, Jimmy's grandfather had earned day wages at the spinning frame.

Jimmy felt dull and thought a day on the rocks would brace him up. Since his object for the Canadian excursion was to shoot a mountain-sheep and climb a peak in the Rockies, he ought to get into trim. Stannard could play cards all night and start fresh in the morning on an adventure that tried one's nerve and muscle, but Jimmy admitted he could not. When he loafed about hotel rotundas and consumed iced drinks he got soft.

After a time, Laura Stannard crossed the veranda and went along the terrace. Her white dress was fashionable and she wore a big white hat. Her hair and eyes were black, her figure was gracefully slender, and her carriage was good. Jimmy thought her strangely attractive, but did not altogether know if she was his friend, and admitted that he was not Laura's sort. It was not that she was proud. Something about her indicated that her proper background was an old-fashioned English country house; Jimmy felt his was a Lancashire cotton mill. Laura did not live with Stannard, but she joined him and Jimmy in Switzerland not long before they started for Canada. Stannard was jealous about his daughter and had indicated that his friends were not necessarily hers. Jimmy had grounds to think Stannard's caution justified.

For a minute or two Jimmy left the girl alone. He imagined if Laura were willing to talk to him she would let him know. She went to the end of the terrace, and then turning opposite a bench, looked up and smiled. Jimmy advanced and when he joined her leaned against the low wall. Laura studied him quietly and he got embarrassed. Somehow he felt she disapproved; he imagined he did not altogether look as if he had got up after a night's refreshing sleep.

"You got breakfast early," she remarked.

"That is so," Jimmy agreed. "A fellow at my table argues about our slowness in the Old Country and sometimes one would sooner be quiet. Then I thought I'd go off and see if I could reach the ice-fall on the glacier; after the sun gets hot the snow is treacherous. Anyhow, you have come down as soon as I."

"I mean to go on the lake and try to catch a trout."

"Then, I hope you'll let me come. You'll want somebody to row the boat and use the landing-net."

"The hotel guide will row and I doubt if we'll need the landing-net," Laura replied and gave him a level glance. "Besides, I shall return for lunch and I rather think you ought to go for a long climb. When I came out, you looked moody and slack."

Jimmy coloured. Although he was embarrassed, to know Laura had bothered to remark his moodiness was flattering; the strange thing was, when she crossed the veranda he had not thought she saw

him. Jimmy was raw, but not altogether a fool. He knew Laura did not mean him to go with her to the lake.

"Oh, well," he said. "When one loafs about, one does get slack."

"You are young and ought not to loaf."

"I imagine I'm a little older than you," Jimmy rejoined with a twinkle.

Laura let it go. As a rule, she did not take the obvious line, and although she knew much Jimmy did not, she said, "Are you old enough to play cards with Jackson and Deering?"

"One must pay for all one gets, and, in a sense, I get much from men like that," Jimmy replied. "There's something one likes about Jackson, and Deering's a very good sort."

"Are you ambitious to be Deering's sort?" Laura asked.

Jimmy pondered. It was obvious she knew the men were Stannard's friends and she, no doubt, knew Stannard was a keen gambler. The ground was awkward and he must use some caution.

"Mr. Stannard's my model," he said.

Laura's glance was inscrutable. Since her mother died she had not lived with Stannard and he puzzled her. Sometimes she was disturbed about him, and sometimes she was jarred. When she joined him for a few weeks he was kind, but he did not ask for her confidence and did not give her his.

"It looks as if my father's attraction for you was strong," she said thoughtfully.

"That is so," Jimmy declared with a touch of enthusiasm Laura saw was sincere. "Mr. Stannard

has all the qualities I'd like to cultivate. My habit, so to speak, is to shove along laboriously; he gets where he wants without an effort. On the trains and steamers he gets for nothing things another couldn't buy, and at the hotel the waiters serve him first. People trust him and are keen about his society. He's urbane and polished, but when you go with him on the rocks you note his steely pluck. When I'm stuck and daunted he smiles, and somehow I get up the awkward slab. Besides, he stands for much I wanted but couldn't get until he helped."

"What did you want?"

"Excitement, adventure, and the friendship of clever people; something like that," said Jimmy awkwardly. "To begin with, I'd better tell you about my life in Lancashire, but I expect you're bored——"

Laura was not bored; in fact, her curiosity was excited. Stannard's young friends were numerous, but when he opened his London flat to them she stopped with her aunts. Now she wondered whether it was important he had allowed her to join his Canadian excursion.

"I'm not at all bored," she said.

"Very well. My father died long since and I went to my uncle's house. I'd like to draw Ardshaw for you, but I cannot. Inside, it's overcrowded by clumsy Victorian furniture; outside is a desolation of industrial ugliness. Smoky fields, fenced by old colliery ropes, a black canal, and coalpit winding towers. I went to school on board a steam tram, along a road bordered all the way by miners' cottages."

"The picture's not attractive," Laura remarked. "Was your uncle satisfied with his house?"

Jimmy smiled. "I think he was altogether satisfied. The Leylands are a utilitarian lot, and rather like ugliness. Our interests are business, and religion of a stern Puritanical sort. From my relations' point of view, grace and beauty are snares. Besides, Dick Leyland got Ardshaw cheap and I expect this accounts for much. When he went there the Leyland mills were small; my grandfather had not long started on his lucky speculation."

"But after a time you went away to school—a public school?"

"I did not. I imagined it was obvious," said Jimmy with a touch of dryness. "I went to the mill office and sat under a gas-lamp, writing entries in the stock-books, from nine o'clock until six. Dick Leyland had no use for university cultivation and my aunt was persuaded Oxford was a haunt of profligates. Well, because I was forced, I held out until I was twenty-one. Then I'd had enough and I went to London."

"Were your relations willing for you to go?"

"They were not at all willing, but I inherit a third-part of the Leyland mills. For all that, unless my trustees approve, I cannot, for another two or three years, exercise control, and the sum I may spend is fixed. Well, perhaps you can picture my launching out in town. I had no rules to go by; I wore the stamp of the cotton mill and a second-class school. For five years I'd earned a small clerk's pay, and now, by contrast, I was rich."

Laura could picture it. The boy's reaction from

his uncle's firm and parsimonious guardianship was natural, and she studied him with fresh curiosity. He was tall but rather loosely built, and his look was apologetic, as if he had not yet got a man's strength and confidence. One noted the stamp of the cotton mill. As a rule Jimmy was generous and extravagant; but sometimes he was strangely business-like.

"Were you satisfied with your experiment?" she asked.

"I expect you're tired. If you were not kind, you'd have sent me off."

"Not at all," said Laura. "I like to study people, and your story has a human touch. In a way, it's the revolt of youth."

"Oh, well; I expect one does not often get all one thinks to get. I wanted the cultivation Oxford might have given me; I wanted to know people of your sort, who don't bother about business, but hunt and fish and shoot. Well, I can throw a dry-fly and hold a gun straight; but after all I'm Jimmy Leyland, from the mills in Lancashire."

Laura liked his honesty, but his voice was now not apologetic. She rather thought it proud.

"You met my father in Switzerland?" she said.

"At Chamonix, about a year ago. When I met Mr. Stannard my luck was good. I'd got into the wrong lot; they used me and laughed. Well, your father showed me where I was going and sent the others off. Perhaps you know how he does things like that? He's urbane, but very firm. Anyhow, the others went and I've had numerous grounds to trust Mr. Stannard since."

Jimmy lighted a cigarette. Perhaps he ought to go, but Laura's interest was flattering and she had not allowed him to talk like this before. In fact, he rather wondered why she had done so. In the meantime Laura pondered his artless narrative. His liking her father was not strange, for Stannard's charm was strong, but Laura imagined to enjoy his society cost his young friends something. Perhaps it had cost Jimmy something, for he had stated that one must pay for all one got. He was obviously willing to pay, but Laura was puzzled. If his uncle's portrait was accurate, she imagined the sum Jimmy was allowed to spend was not large.

"One ought to have an object and know where one means to go," she remarked. "When you look ahead, are you satisfied?"

"In the meantime, I'll let Mr. Stannard indicate the way," said Jimmy with a smile. "On the whole, I expect Dick Leyland would sooner I didn't meddle at the office, but after a year or two I'll probably go back. You see, Dick has no children and Jim's not married. To carry on Leyland's is my job."

"Who is Jim?"

"Sir James Leyland, knight. In Lancashire we have not much use for titles; the head of the house is Jim and I'm Jimmy. Perhaps the diminutive is important."

"But suppose your uncles did not approve your carrying on the house?"

"Then, I imagine they could, for a time, force me to leave the mills alone. However, although Dick is very like a machine, I've some grounds to think

Jim human. All the same, I hardly know him. He's at Bombay ; the house transacts much business in India. But I must have bored you and you haven't got breakfast. I suppose you really won't let me row the boat ? "

Laura pondered. Her curiosity was not altogether satisfied and she now was willing for Jimmy to join her on the lake. Yet she had refused, and after his frank statement, she had better not agree.

" I have engaged the hotel guide, Miss Grant is going, and the boat is small," she said. " Besides, when one means to catch trout one must concentrate."

Jimmy went off and Laura knitted her brows. She knew Jimmy's habit was not to boast, and if she had understood him properly, he would by and by control the fortunes of the famous manufacturing house. Her father's plan was rather obvious, and the blood came to Laura's skin. She knew something about poverty and admitted that when she married her marriage must be good, but she was not an adventuress. Yet Jimmy was rather a handsome fellow and had some attractive qualities.

III

THE CAYUSE PONY

THE afternoon was hot, the little wineberry bushes were soft, and Jimmy lay in a big hemlock's shade. A few yards in front, a falling pine had broken the row of straight red trunks, and in the gap shining snow peaks cut the serene sky. Below, the trees rolled down the hillside, and at the bottom a river sparkled. Rivers, however, were numerous, the bush on the hill-bench Jimmy had crossed was thick, and he frankly did not know where he had come down. If the hotel was in the valley, he need not bother, but he doubted, and was not keen about climbing another mountain spur. In the meantime, he smoked his pipe and mused.

He owed Stannard rather a large sum. They went about to shooting parties at country houses and lodges by Scottish salmon rivers. Visiting with Stannard's sporting friends was expensive and he allowed Jimmy to bear the cost. Jimmy was willing and made Stannard his banker; now and then they reckoned up and Jimmy gave him an acknowledgment for the debt. Although Stannard stated he was poor, his habits were extravagant and somehow he got money.

Yet Jimmy did not think Stannard exploited him. He had found his advice good and Stannard had saved him from some awkward entanglements. In fact, Stannard was his friend, and although his friendship was perhaps expensive, in a year or two Jimmy would be rich. Since his parsimonious uncle had not let him go to a university, his spending a good sum was justified, and to go about with Stannard was a liberal education. Perhaps, for a careless young fellow, Jimmy's argument was strangely commercial, but he was the son of a keen and frugal business man.

Then he began to muse about Laura. Her beauty and refinement attracted him, but he imagined Laura knew his drawbacks, and to think Stannard had planned for him to marry her was ridiculous. Stannard was not like that, and when Laura was with him saw that Jimmy did not get much of her society. In fact, had she not come down for breakfast before the other guests, Jimmy imagined he would not have enjoyed a confidential talk with her. All the same, to loaf in the shade and dwell on Laura's charm was soothing.

In the meantime, he was hungry. He had not bothered to carry his lunch and when he came down for breakfast he had not much appetite. Since morning he had scrambled about the rocks, and he thought the hotel was some distance off. Getting up with something of an effort, he plunged down hill through the underbrush. At the bottom he stopped and frowned. He ought not to have lost his breath, but he had done so and his heart

beat. It looked as if he must cut out strong cigars and iced liquor.

A few yards off a trail went up the valley and slanted sunbeams crossed the narrow opening. Jimmy thought he heard a horse's feet and resolved to wait and ask about the hotel. He was in the shade, but for a short distance the spot commanded the trail.

The beat of horse's feet got louder and a girl rode out from the gap in the dark pine branches. A sunbeam touched her and her hair and the steel buckle in her soft felt hat shone. She rode astride and wore fringed leggings and a jacket of soft deerskin. Her figure was graceful and she swung easily with the horse's stride. Her hair was like gold and her eyes were deep blue. Jimmy afterwards thought it strange he noted so much, but she, so to speak, sprang from the gloom like a picture on a film, and the picture held him.

He did not know if the girl was beautiful, but in the tangled woods her charm was keen. Her dress harmonized with the moss on the tall red trunks, and the ripening fern. Something primitive and strong marked her easy, confident pose. The horse, an Indian *cayuse*, tossed its head and glanced about nervously, as if its habit was to scent danger in the bush. Jimmy sprang from primitive stock and he knew, half instinctively, the girl's type was his. He must, however, inquire about the hotel, and he pushed through the raspberries by the trail.

The horse, startled by the noise, stopped and tried to turn. The girl pulled the bridle and braced

herself back. The cayuse jumped like a cat, plunged forward, and feeling the bit, bucked savagely. Jimmy wondered how long the girl would stick to the saddle, but after a moment or two the cayuse started for the bush. Jimmy thought he knew the trick, for when a cayuse cannot buck off its rider it goes for a tree, and if one keeps one's foot in the stirrup, one risks a broken leg. He jumped for its head and seized the links at the bit.

The girl ordered him to let go, but he did not. He had frightened her horse and must not allow the savage brute to jamb her against a tree. Its ears were pressed back and he saw its teeth, but so long as he stuck to the bit, it could not seize his hand. Then it went round in a semi-circle, the link twisted and pinched his fingers, and he knew he could not hold on. The animal's head went up, Jimmy got a heavy blow and fell across the trail. A few moments afterwards he heard a beat of hoofs, some distance off, and knew the cayuse was gone. The girl, breathing rather hard, leaned against a trunk.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

"I don't know yet," Jimmy gasped. "I'll find out when I get up."

He got up and forced a smile. "Anyhow, nothing's broken. Are you hurt?"

"No," she said. "I'm not hurt, but I'm angry. When you butted in I couldn't use the bridle."

"I'm sorry; I wanted to help. However, it looks as if your horse had run away. Have you far to go?"

"The ranch is three miles off."

" How far's the hotel ? "

" If you go by the trail, about eight miles. Perhaps four miles, if you cross the range."

Jimmy studied the thick timber and the steep rocky slopes. Pushing through tangled underbrush has drawbacks, particularly where devil's-club thorns are numerous. Besides, he had got a nasty knock and his leg began to hurt. Then he noted a cotton flour bag with straps attached lying in the trail.

" I think I won't cross the range. I suppose that bag is yours ? "

" It is mine. They put our supplies off the train. I reckon the bag weighs about forty pounds. I carried the thing on the front of the saddle ; but when you——"

Jimmy nodded. " When I butted in you were forced to let it go ! Well, since I frightened your horse, I ought to carry your bag. If I take it to the ranch, do you think your folks would give me supper."

" It's possible. Can you carry the bag ? "

" I'll try," said Jimmy. " Have you some grounds to doubt ? "

" Packing a load over a rough trail is not as easy as it looks," the girl rejoined with a twinkle. " Then I expect you're a tourist tenderfoot."

Jimmy liked her smile and he liked her voice. Her Western accent was not marked and her glance was frank. He thought, if he had not meddled, she would have mastered the frightened horse ; her strength and pluck were obvious. In the meantime his leg hurt and he could not examine the injury.

" I am a tourist," he agreed. " Since I'm going to your house, perhaps I ought to state that I'm Jimmy Leyland, from Lancashire in the Old Country."

" I am Margaret Jardine."

" Then you're a Scot ? "

" My father is a Scot," said Margaret. " I'm Canadian."

" Ah," said Jimmy, " I've heard something like that before and begin to see what it implies. Well, it looks as if you were an independent lot. Is one allowed to state that in the Old Country we are rather proud of you ? "

" Since I'd like to make Kelshope before dark, perhaps you had better get going," Margaret remarked.

Jimmy picked up the bag and fastened the deerskin straps, by which it hung from his shoulders like a rucksack. They started, and for a time he kept up with Margaret, but he did not talk. The pack was heavy, he had not got much breakfast and had gone without his lunch. Besides, his leg was getting very sore. At length he stopped and began to loose the straps.

" Do you mind if I take a smoke ? " he asked.

Margaret looked at him rather hard, but said she did not mind, and Jimmy, indicating a cedar log, pulled out his cigarette case.

" Do you smoke ? "

" I do not. In the bush, we haven't yet copied the girls at the hotels."

" Now I think about it, the girls who smoked at the Montreal hotel were not numerous," Jimmy remarked. " When I went to the fishing lodge in

Scotland, all smoked, but then Stannard's friends are very much up-to-date. The strange thing is, we're thought antiquated in the Old Country——"

He stopped and tried to brace up. What he wanted to state eluded him. He felt cold and the pines across the trail got indistinct.

"You see, in some of our circles we rather feel our duty is to be modern," he resumed with an effort. "I think you're not like that. Canada's a new country, but, in a way, one feels you're really older than us. We have got artificial; you are flesh and blood——"

"Don't talk!" said Margaret firmly, but Jimmy thought her voice was faint, and for a few moments the tall pines melted altogether.

When he looked up Margaret asked: "Have you got a tobacco pouch?"

Jimmy gave her the pouch and she went off. He was puzzled and rather annoyed, but somehow he could not get on his feet. By and by Margaret came back, carrying the pouch opened like a double cup. Jimmy drank some water and the numbness began to go.

"You're very kind. I expect I'm ridiculous," he said.

"I was not kind. I let you carry the pack, although the cayuse knocked you down."

"Perhaps the knock accounts for something," Jimmy remarked in a languid voice.

He had got a nasty knock, but he imagined Stannard's cigars and Deering's iced drinks were really accountable. In the meantime, he noted that Margaret was wiping his tobacco pouch.

"You mustn't bother," he resumed. "Give me the thing."

"But when it's wet you cannot put in the tobacco."

"I thought you threw away the stuff. I can get another lot at the hotel."

Margaret brushed the tobacco from a flake of bark, and filled the pouch.

"In the woods, one doesn't throw away expensive tobacco."

"Thanks!" said Jimmy. "Some time since, I lived with people like you."

"Poor and frugal people?"

"No," said Jimmy, with a twinkle. "Dick and his wife were rather rich. In fact, in England, I think you begin to use economy when you get rich. Anyhow, it's not important, and you needn't bother about me. As a rule, philosophizing doesn't knock me out. The cayuse kicked pretty hard. Well, suppose we start?"

He got up and when Margaret tried to take the pack he pulled it away.

"The job's mine. I undertook to carry the load."

"But you're tired, and I think you're lame."

"We won't dispute," said Jimmy. "You oughtn't to dispute. Perhaps it's strange, but one feels your word ought to go."

"It looks as if my word did not go."

"Oh well," said Jimmy, "when you command people, you have got to use some caution. Much depends on whom you command, and in Lancashire we're an obstinate lot. Anyhow, I'll take the bag."

He pushed his arms through the straps and Margaret said nothing. She might have taken the bag from him, but to use force was not dignified and she knew to let her carry the load would jar. When they set off she noted that his face was rather white and his step was not even. He had obviously got a nasty kick, but his pluck was good.

The sun went down behind the woods, the pines got dim and sweet resinous scents floated about the trail. The hum of insects came out of the shadow, and Jimmy was forced to rub the mosquitos from his neck. To put up his hands was awkward, for the ground was uneven, and he must balance his load. He could not talk, the important thing was to reach the ranch before it got dark, and setting his mouth, he pushed ahead.

At length Margaret stopped at a fence, and when she began to pull down the rails Jimmy leaned against a post. The rails were rudely split, and the zig-zag fence was locked by crossed supports and not fastened by nails. On the other side, where timothy grass and oats had grown, was stubble, dotted by tall pine-stumps and fern. A belt of chopped trees surrounded the clearing, and behind the tangled belt the forest rose like a dark wall. An indistinct log house and barns occupied the other end. An owl swooped noiselessly across the fence, and Jimmy heard the distant howl of a timber wolf.

" Kelshope ranch," said Margaret. " The path goes to the house. I must put up the rails."

Jimmy went through the gap. Perhaps it was the soothing quietness, but he felt he liked Kel-

shope and his curiosity was excited. He knew the big Canadian hotels, the pulmans and observation-cars. So far, money had supplied him, as in London, with much that made life smooth. Now he was to see something of the Canada in which man must labour for all he gets. The strange thing was, he felt this was the Canada he really ought to know.

IV

KELSHOPE RANCH

BREAKFAST was over at Kelshope ranch and Jimmy occupied a log at the edge of the clearing. Although his muscles were sore, he felt strangely fresh and somehow satisfied. At the hotel, as a rule, he had not felt like that. His leg hurt, but his host had doctored the cut with some American liniment, and Jimmy was content to rest in the shade and look about. He thought he saw the whole process of clearing a ranch.

In the background, was virgin forest; pine, spruce and hemlock, locking their dark branches. Then one noted the *slashing*, where chopped trees had fallen in tangled rows, and an inner belt of ashes and blackened stumps. Other stumps, surrounded by fern, checkered the oblong of cultivated soil, and the dew sparkled on the short oat stubble. The oats were not grown for milling; the heads were small and Jardine cut the crop for hay. The garden-lot and house occupied a gentle slope. The walls were built of logs, notched and crossed at the corners; cedar shingles, split by hand on the spot, covered the roof. Behind the house, one saw fruit trees and log barns. Nothing was factory-

made and Jimmy thought all indicated strenuous labour.

A yard or two off, Jardine rubbed his double-bitted axe with a small round hone. He wore a grey shirt, overalls and long boots, and his skin was very brown. He was not a big man, but he looked hard and muscular and his glance was keen.

"Ye need to get the edge good. It pays to keep her sharp," he said and tried the blade with his thumb.

"I expect that is so," Jimmy agreed. "Did you, yourself, clear the ranch?"

"I chopped every tree, burned the slashing, and put up the house and barns. Noo I'm getting things in trim and run a small bunch of stock."

Jimmy thought it a tremendous undertaking; the logs stacked ready to burn were two or three feet across the butt.

"How long were you occupied?" he asked.

"Twelve years," said Jardine, rather drily. "When the country doon the Fraser began to open up I sold my other ranch, bought two or three building lots in a new town, and started for the bush. I liked this location and I stopped."

"But can you get your stuff to a market?"

"Cows can walk, but when ye clear a bush ranch ye dinna bother much about selling truck. Ye sit tight until the Government cuts a wagon trail, or maybe a railroad's built, and the settlements spring up."

"And then you expect to sell for a good price all the stuff you grow?"

Jardine smiled. "Then I expect to sell the ranch and push on again. The oldtime bush-man has no use for game-wardens, city sports, store-keepers and real-estate boomers——"

He stopped and his look got scornful. Jimmy found out afterwards that the pioneer hates the business man and Jardine sprang from Scottish Border stock. Perhaps he had inherited his pride and independence from salmon-poaching ancestors. What he wanted he laboured for; to traffic was not his plan.

"Weel," he resumed, "I'd better get busy. After dinner I'll drive ye to the hotel."

He went off, and although Jimmy had expected to lunch at the hotel he was satisfied to wait. He mused about his host. Jardine was not young, but he carried himself well and Jimmy had known young men who did not move like him; then the ranch indicated his talent for labour. Yet muscular strength was obviously not all one needed; to front and remove daunting obstacles, one must have pluck and imagination. The job was a man's job, but, in a sense, the qualities it demanded were primitive, and Jimmy began to see why the ranch attracted him. His grandfather had laboured in another's mill; the house of Leyland's was founded on stubborn effort and stern frugality.

Jimmy began to wonder where Jardine fed his cattle, because he saw none in the clearing, but by and by a distant clash of bells rolled across the trees. Jimmy had heard the noise before; when he went to sleep and again at daybreak, a faint, elusive chime had broken the quietness that brooded

over Kelshope ranch. It was the clash of cow-bells, ringing as the stock pushed through the underbrush. When he heard a sharper note he got up and, for his leg hurt, went cautiously into the woods.

By and by he stopped in the tall fern. Not far off Margaret, holding out a bunch of corn, occupied the middle of an opening in which little red wineberries grew. Her pose was graceful, she did not wear a hat, and the sun was on her hair. Her neck was very white, and then her skin was delicate pink that deepened to brown. Her dress was dull blue and the yellow corn forced up the soft colour.

"Oh, Bright; oh, Buck!" she called, and Jimmy thought her voice musical like the chiming bells.

Where the sunbeams pierced the shade long horns gleamed, the bells rang louder, and a big brown ox looked out, fixed its quiet eyes on the girl, and vanished noiselessly. Margaret did not move at all. She was still as the trees in the background, and Jimmy approved her quietness. He got a hint of balance, strength and calm.

"Oh, Bright!" she called, and a brawny red-and-white animal pushed out from the fern, shook its massive head, and advanced to smell the corn.

Jimmy now saw Margaret carried a rope in her other hand, but she let the ox eat the corn and stroked its white forehead before she threw the rope round its horns. Although she was very quick, her movements were gentle and the animal stood still. Then she looked up and smiled.

"You can come out, Mr. Leyland."

"You knew I was in the fern?"

"Sure," said Margaret. "I was born in the woods. All the same, you were quiet. I reckon you can be quiet. In the bush, that's something."

"You imply that I was quiet, for a tenderfoot?"

"Why, yes," Margaret agreed, smiling. "As a rule, a man from the cities can't keep still. He must talk and move about. You didn't feel you ought to come and help?"

Jimmy wondered whether she knew he had wanted to study her, but thought she did not. Anyhow, he was satisfied she, so to speak, had not posed for him.

"Not at all," he said. "I saw you knew your job, and I reflected that the ox did not know me. But shall I hold him until you catch the other?"

"Buck will follow his mate," Margaret replied, and when they started a cow-bell clashed and Buck stole out of the shade.

Jimmy thought stole the proper word. He had expected to hear branches crack and underbrush rustle, but the powerful oxen moved almost silently through the wood.

"Now I see why you give them bells," he remarked. "But doesn't the jangling bother the animals?"

"They like the bells. At night I think they toss their heads to hear the chime. Then they know the bells are useful. Sometimes when all is

quiet the cattle scatter, but when the timber wolves are about or a cinnamon bear comes down the rocks the herd rolls up. Bush cattle are clever. Now Bright feels the rope, he's resigned to go to work."

"You know the woods. Have you always lived at a ranch?"

"For a time I was at Toronto," Margaret replied. "When I was needed at Kelshope, I came back."

Jimmy felt she baffled him. Margaret had not stated her occupation at Toronto, but he had remarked that her English was better than the English one used at the cotton mills. After all, he was not entitled to satisfy his curiosity.

"One can understand Mr. Jardine's needing you," he said. "I expect a bush rancher is forced to hustle."

"A bush rancher must hustle all the time," Margaret agreed. "Still, work one likes goes easily. Have you tried?"

"I have tried work I did not like and admit I've had enough," Jimmy said, and laughed. "When I started for Canada, my notion was I'd be content to play about."

Margaret nodded. "We know your sort. You are not like our tourists, merchants and manufacturers. You have no use for business. All you think about is sport, and your sport's extravagant. You stop at our big hotels, and when you go off to hunt and fish you hire a gang of packers to carry your camp truck."

"I doubt if I really am that sort," Jimmy rejoined.

" After all, my people are pretty keen business men, and I begin to see that to cultivate the habits of the other lot is harder than I thought. In fact, I rather think I'd like to own a ranch."

" For a game ? " said Margaret and laughed, a frank laugh. " You must cut it out, Mr. Leyland. One can't play at ranching, and you don't know all the bushman is up against."

" It's possible," Jimmy admitted. " Well, I expect I am a loafer, but I did not altogether joke about the ranch. The strange thing is, after a time loafing gets monotonous."

Margaret stopped him. " I must get busy and you ought not to walk about. Sit down in the shade and I'll give you the *Colonist*."

Jimmy sat down, but declared he did not want the newspaper. He thought he would study ranching, particularly Margaret's part of the job. She put a heavy wooden yoke on the oxen's necks, fastened a rope to the hook, and drove the animals to a belt of burned slashing where big charred logs lay about. Jardine hitched the rope to a log and the team hauled it slowly to a pile. Jimmy wondered how two people would get the heavy trunk on top, but when Margaret led the oxen round the pile and urged them ahead, the log went up in a loop of the rope. For all that, Jardine was forced to use a handspike and Jimmy saw that to build a log-pile demanded strength and skill.

Resting in the shade, he felt the picture's quiet charm. The oxen's movements were slow and rhythmical ; Jardine's muscular figure, bent, got tense, and relaxed ; the girl, finely posed, guided

the plodding animals. Behind were stiff, dark branches and rows of straight red trunks. A woodpecker tapped a hollow tree, and in the distance cow-bells chimed. The dominant note was effort, but the effort was smooth and measured. One felt that all went as it ought to go, and Jimmy thought about the big shining flywheel that span with a steady throb at the Leyland cotton mill. Then his head began to nod and his eyes shut, and when he looked up Margaret called him to dinner.

After dinner Jardine got out his Clover-leaf wagon and drove Jimmy to the hotel. When they arrived Jimmy took him to his room on the first floor, and meeting Stannard on the stairs, was rather moved to note his relief. Stannard declared that he and some others had searched the woods since daybreak and were about to start for the ranch. By and by Deering joined them and made an iced drink. Jardine, with tranquil enjoyment, drained his long glass, and lighting a cigar, began to talk about hunting in the bush. His clothes were old and his hat was battered, but his calm was marked and Jimmy thought he studied the others with quiet curiosity. After a time they went off, and Jardine gave Jimmy a thoughtful smile.

"Your friends are polite and Mr. Deering can mix a drink better than a bar-keep."

"Is that all?" Jimmy inquired.

Jardine's eyes twinkled. "Weel, if I was wanting somebody to see me out, maybe I'd trust the big fellow."

Jimmy thought his remark strange. Stannard was a cultivated gentleman and Deering was frankly

a gambler. Yet Jimmy had grounds to imagine the old rancher was not a fool. He was puzzled and rather annoyed, but Jardine said he must not stop and Jimmy let him go.

V

JIMMY HOLDS FAST

THE sun had sunk behind the range, and the sky was green. In places the high white peaks were touched by fading pink; the snow that rolled down to the timber-line was blue. Mist floated about the pines by the river, but did not reach the hotel terrace, and the evening was warm. Looking down at the dark valley, one got a sense of space and height

At the end of the terrace, a small table carried a coffee service, and Laura occupied a basket chair. She smoked a cigarette and her look was thoughtful. Jimmy, sitting opposite, liked her fashionable dinner dress. He had met Laura in Switzerland, but he felt as if he had not known her until she went with Stannard to the Canadian hotel. In fact, he imagined she had very recently begun to allow him to know her. Stannard had gone off a few minutes since, and Deering was playing pool with a young American.

"Since you came back from the ranch I've thought you preoccupied," Laura remarked.

"I expect you thought me dull," said Jimmy with an apologetic smile. "Well, for some days

I've been pondering things, and I'm not much used to the exercise. In a way, you're accountable. You inquired not long since if I knew where I was going ? "

" Then you got some illumination at the ranch ? "

" You're keen. I got disturbed."

" Does to stop at a ranch disturb one ? " Laura asked in a careless voice.

" I expect it depends on your temperament," Jimmy replied and knitted his brows. " Kelshope is a model ranch ; you feel all goes as it ought to go. When you leave things alone, they don't go like that. At Jardine's you get a sense of plan and effort. The old fellow and his daughter are keenly occupied, and their occupation, so to speak, is fruitful. The trouble is, mine is not."

Laura saw that when he, some time since, apologized for his loafing, her remarks had carried weight. Jimmy had begun to ponder on his future, and she wondered whether he would see he ought to return to the cotton mill. Still she did not mean to talk about this.

" You stopped Miss Jardine's horse ? " she said.

" I did not stop the horse. I tried, but that's another thing. If I had not meddled, I expect Miss Jardine would have conquered the nervous brute and I would not have got a nasty kick."

" Oh, well," said Laura. " Sometimes to meddle is rash, but your object was good."

Then Stannard came to the veranda steps and looked about the terrace.

" Hallo, Jimmy ! Deering has beaten Frank and we must arrange about our excursion to-morrow."

Jimmy frowned and hesitated. When he had talked to Laura before, Stannard had called him away, but he thought she did not mean him to stop and he went off. When he had gone Laura mused.

She knew Stannard was jealous for her. As a rule he did not allow her to join him when his young friends were about, and she did not want to do so. For the most part she lived with her mother's relations, who did not approve Stannard and were not satisfied about her going to Canada.

To some extent Laura imagined their doubts were justified. She knew Stannard had squandered much of her mother's fortune, and now her trustees guarded the small sum she had inherited, he was poor. Yet he belonged to good clubs and went to race meetings and shooting parties. It looked as if sport and gambling paid, and Laura saw what this implied. Yet her father was kind and when she was with him he indulged her.

She had remarked his calling Jimmy away. As a rule, his touch was very light, and she wondered whether he had meant to incite the young fellow by a hint of disapproval; but perhaps it was not his object and she speculated about Jimmy. On the whole she liked him, and he was now not the raw lad she had known in Switzerland, although he was losing something that at the beginning had attracted her. She thought he ought not to stop with Stannard and particularly with Deering, and she had tried to indicate the proper line for him to take. Well, suppose he resolved to go back to Lancashire? Laura knew her charm and imagined,

if she were willing, she might go with Jimmy. Although he could not yet use his fortune, he was rich, and after a time would control the famous manufacturing house. Besides, he was marked by some qualities she liked. Laura got up with an impatient shrug, and blushed. She would not think about it yet. She was poor, but she was not an adventuress.

In the morning, Stannard, Deering and Jimmy started for the rocks. Their object was to follow the range and look for a line to the top of a peak they meant to climb another day. They lunched on the mountain, and in the afternoon stopped at the side of a gully that ran down to the glacier. The back of the gully was smooth, and the pitch was steep, but hardly steep enough to bother an athletic man. In places, banks of small gravel rested, although it looked as if a disturbing foot would send down the stones.

Some distance above the spot, the top of another pitch cut a background of broken rocks, streaked by veins of snow. The sun was on the rocks and some shone like polished steel, but the gully was in shadow and Jimmy had felt the gloom daunting. Deering pulled out his cigar-case. His face was red, his shirt was open and his sunburned neck was like a bull's.

" My load's two hundred pounds, and we have shoved along pretty fast since lunch," he said. " Anyhow, I'm going to stop and take a smoke."

" To lean against a slippery rock won't rest you much," Stannard remarked. " We'll get on to the shelf at the top of the slab."

" Then, somebody's got to boost me up," Deering declared, and when Stannard went to help, put his boot on the other's head and crushed his soft hat down to his ears.

Next moment he was on the shelf and shouted with laughter. Sometimes Deering's humour was boyishly rude, but his friends were not cheated, and Jimmy thought the big man keen and resolute. Stannard went up lightly, as if it did not bother him. He was cool and, by contrast with Deering, looked fastidiously refined. Jimmy imagined he had an object for leaving the gully. Stannard knew the mountains; in fact, he knew all a sporting gentleman ought to know and Jimmy was satisfied with his guide.

" Since you reckon we ought to get from under, why'd you fix on this line down ? " Deering inquired.

" The line's good, but we were longer than I thought, and the sun has been for some time on the snow."

" Sure," said Deering. " The blamed trough looks like a rubbish shoot."

Jimmy had trusted Stannard's judgment, but now he saw a light; for one thing, the back of the gully was smooth. The mountain fronted rather North of West, and so long as the frost at the summit held, the party did not run much risk, but when the thaw began snow and broken rocks might roll down. When Deering had nearly smoked his cigar he looked up.

" Something's coming ! "

Jimmy heard a rumble and a crash. A big stone leaped down the gully, struck a rock and

vanished. A bank of gravel began to slip away, and then a grey and white mass swept across the top of the pitch. Snow and stones poured down tumultuously, and when the avalanche was gone confused echoes rolled about the rocks.

"That fixes it," said Deering. "I'm going the other way. Had we shoved along a little faster, we might have made it, but I was soft, and couldn't hit up the pace." He laughed his boisterous laugh and resumed: "The trouble is, I played cards with Jimmy when I ought to have gone to bed. Well, since we didn't bring a rope, what are you going to do about it?"

"If we can reach the top, I think we can get down along the edge," Stannard replied.

After something of a struggle, they got up, and for a time to follow the top of the gully was not hard. Then they stopped on an awkward pitch where a big bulging stone, jambed in a crack, cut their view.

"I'll try the stone, but perhaps you had better traverse out across the face and look for another line," Deering said to Stannard.

Jimmy went with Deering, and when they reached the stone saw a broken shelf three or four yards below. On one side, the rocks dropped straight to the gully; in front, the slope beyond the shelf was steep. For a few moments Deering studied the ground.

"A rope would be useful, but if we can reach the shelf, we ought to get down," he said. "I'll try to make it. Lie across the stone and give me your hands."

Jimmy nodded. At an awkward spot the second man helps the leader, who afterwards steadies him. The rock was rough and a small knob and the deep crack promised some support. Still, caution was needed, because the shelf, on which one must drop, was inclined and narrow. Jimmy lay across the stone and Deering, slipping over the edge, seized his hands. He was a big fellow and Jimmy thought the stone moved, but he heard Deering's boots scrape the rock and the strain on his arms was less.

Then he heard another noise, and snow and rocks and a broken pine rolled down the gully. The avalanche vanished, the uproar sank, and Deering gaped, " Hold fast ! "

The load on Jimmy's arms got insupportable. He imagined the noise had startled Deering and his foot had slipped from the knob. It looked as if he must hold the fellow until he found the crack. Jimmy meant to try, although the stone rocked, and he knew he could not long bear the horrible strain. If Deering fell, he would not stop at the shelf ; he might not stop for three or four hundred feet. Jimmy set his mouth and tried to brace his knees against the rock. The stone was moving, and if it moved much, Deering would pull him over. Yet in a moment or two Deering might get his boot in the crack, and to let him fall was unthinkable.

Jimmy held on until Deering shouted and let go. He had obviously found some support, and Jimmy tried to get back, but could not. His chest was across the edge, and the stone rocked. He was slipping off, and saw, half-consciously,

that since he must fall, he must not fall down the rock front. Pushing himself from the edge, he plunged into the gully, struck the rock some way down, and knew no more. Deering, on the shelf, saw him reach the bottom, roll for a distance and stop. He lay face downwards, with his arms spread out.

A few moments afterwards Stannard reached the spot and looked down. Deering's big chest heaved, his mouth was slack, and his face was white. When he indicated Jimmy his hand shook.

"I pulled him over," he said in a hoarse voice.

Stannard gave him a keen, rather scornful glance. "Traverse across the front for about twenty yards and you'll see a good line down. When you get down, start for the hotel and bring the two guides, our rope, a blanket and two poles. Send somebody to telegraph for a doctor."

"Not at all! I'm going to help Jimmy out. I pulled the kid over."

Stannard frowned. "You are going to the hotel. For one thing, I doubt if you could get down; you're badly jarred and your nerve's gone. Then, unless you get help, we can't carry Jimmy out."

"You mustn't leave him in the gully," Deering rejoined. "Suppose a fresh lot of stones comes along?"

"Go for help," said Stannard, pulling out his watch. "Come back up the gully. If you have got a flask, give it me. I'm going down."

"But if there's another snow-slide, you and Jimmy will get smashed. Besides, the job is mine."

"The snow and stones come down the middle

and they'll stop by and by. Don't talk. Start!"

Deering hesitated. He was big and muscular, but he admitted that on the rocks Stannard was the better man. Moreover, to know he was accountable for Jimmy's plunge had shaken him, and he saw Stannard was very cool.

"Take the flask," he said and went off at a reckless speed.

VI

DEERING OWNS A DEBT

JIMMY saw a pale star, and veins of snow streaking high shadowy rocks. He thought when he looked up not long since the sun was on the mountain, but perhaps it was not. His brain was dull and he was numbed by cold. He shivered and shut his eyes, but after a few minutes he smelt cigar-smoke and looked about again. Although it was getting dark, he saw somebody sitting in the gloom at the bottom of the rocks.

"Where's Deering?" he asked. "Did I let him go?"

"You did not. Take a drink," the other replied and pushed a flask into Jimmy's hand.

Jimmy drank, gasped, and tried to get up, but found he could not move.

"Where is Deering?" he insisted.

"I expect he's crossing the glacier with the guides from the hotel," said the man, who took the flask from him, and Jimmy knew Stannard's voice.

"Then where am I?"

"You are in the gully. You held on to Deering until he got support for his foot. Then you slipped off the big stone. Something like that,

anyhow. Do you feel pain at any particular spot ? "

" I don't know if one spot hurts worse than another. All hurt ; I doubt if I can get up."

" You mustn't try," said Stannard firmly. " When Deering arrives we'll help you up."

Jimmy pondered. Since the evening was very cold, he thought it strange Stannard had pulled off his coat. Then he saw somebody had put over him a coat that was not his.

" Why have you given me your clothes ? " he asked.

" For one thing, I didn't fall about forty feet."

" If I had fallen forty feet, I'd have got smashed. It's obvious ! "

" Perhaps you hit the side of the gully and rolled down, but it's not important. When one gets a jolt like yours the shock's as bad as the local injury. Are you cold ? "

" I'm horribly cold, but although I heard stones not long since I don't think I got hit."

" The stones run down the middle and I pulled you against the rock."

" You're a good sort," Jimmy remarked. " Deering's a good sort. To know he's not hurt is some relief."

Stannard said nothing and Jimmy asked for a cigarette. Stannard gave him a cigarette and a light, but after a few moments he let it drop.

" The tobacco's not good," he said, dully, and began to muse.

He was strangely slack and his body was numb. Perhaps to feel no local pain was ominous ; he

knew a man who fell on the rocks and had not afterwards used his legs. To be wheeled about for all one's life was horrible. When a doctor arrived he would know his luck, and in the meantime he durst not dwell on things like that. He studied the rocks. Stannard had obviously come down by the slanting crack; Jimmy thought he himself could not have done so. Then Stannard, risking getting hit by rebounding stones, had stopped with him for some hours. When Jimmy helped Deering the sun shone, and now the stars were out. The gully was high on the mountain and after the sun went the cold was keen, but Stannard had given him his coat. Stannard was like that.

"I expect you sent Deering to the hotel?" Jimmy resumed after a time.

"Yes; I was firm. Deering wanted to go down to you; but I doubted if he could get down and the important thing was to fetch help. You must be moved as soon as possible."

Jimmy nodded; Deering was the man he had thought. All the same, Stannard's was the finer type. Jimmy had long known his pluck, but he had other qualities. When one must front a crisis he was cool; he saw and carried out the proper plan. But Jimmy's brain was very dull, and Stannard's figure melted and the rocks got indistinct.

After a time, he heard a noise. A shout echoed in the gully, nailed boots rattled on stones and it looked as if men were coming up. Deering, breathless and gasping, arrived before the others and hailed Stannard.

" Not much grounds to be disturbed, I think," said Stannard in a quiet voice. " He was talking sensibly not long since."

Deering came to Jimmy and touched his arm. " You're not broke up, partner? You haven't got it against me that I pulled you off the rock? "

" Certainly not! I slipped off," Jimmy declared. " Anyhow, you're my friend."

" Sure thing," said Deering quietly. " Take a drink of hot soup. We'll soon pack you out." He put a vacuum flask in Jimmy's hand and turned to the others. " Let's get busy, boys."

Jimmy did not know much about their journey down the gully and across the glacier, but at length he was vaguely conscious of bright lights and the tramp of feet along an echoing passage. People gently moved him about; he felt he was in a soft, warm bed, and with languid satisfaction he went to sleep.

When the others saw Jimmy was asleep they went off quietly, but at the end of the passage Deering stopped Stannard.

" Let's get a drink," he said " For four or five hours I've hustled some and I need a pick-me-up."

Stannard gave him a keen glance. Deering had hustled. To carry Jimmy down the rocks and across the glacier, in the dark, was a strenuous undertaking, and where strength was needed the big man had nobly used his. Yet Stannard imagined the strain that had bothered him was not physical.

"Oh, well," he said, "I'll go to the bar with you. Waiting for you in the gully was not a soothing job."

"You knew I'd get back," Deering rejoined. "If I'd had to haul out the cook and bell-boys I'd have brought help."

"I didn't know how long you'd be and speed was important."

"You're a blamed cool fellow," Deering remarked. "If you had not taken control, I expect we'd have jolted Jimmy off the stretcher, and maybe have gone through the snow-bridge the guide didn't spot. Then you stopped with him, pulled him out of the way of the snow-slides, and kept him warm. I expect you saved his life."

"To some extent, perhaps that is so," Stannard agreed. "That somebody must pull Jimmy against the rock was obvious. All the same, I knew the stones wouldn't bother us after it got cold."

Deering was puzzled. Stannard's habit was not to boast, but it looked as if he was willing to admit he had saved Jimmy's life. Deering speculated about his object.

"Well," he said, "I own I was badly rattled. You see, if the kid had not held fast, I'd have gone right down the rock face and don't know where I'd have stopped. Perhaps it's strange, but I remembered I'd got five hundred dollars of his and the thing bothered me. To know I'd played a straight game didn't comfort me much."

"You're a sentimentalist," Stannard rejoined with a smile. "I don't know that a crooked game was suggested. But let's get our drinks."

They went to the bar and when Deering picked up his glass he said, "Good luck to the kid and a quick recovery!" He drained the glass and looked at Stannard hard. "When Jimmy needs a help out, I'm his man."

Stannard said nothing, but lighted a cigarette.

In the morning a young doctor arrived from Calgary and was some time in Jimmy's room.

"I reckon your luck was pretty good," he remarked. "After three or four days you can get up and go about——" He paused and added meaningly: "But you want to go slow."

Jimmy's face was white, but the blood came to his skin.

"I'd begun to think something like that," he said in a languid voice.

The doctor nodded. "Since you could stand for the knock you got, your body's pretty sound, but I get a hint of strain and the cure's moral. You want to cut out hard drinks, strong cigars, and playing cards all night."

"Do the symptoms indicate that I do play cards all night?"

"I own I was helped by inquiries about your habits," said the doctor, smiling. "If you like a game, try pool, with boys like yourself, and bet fifty cents. I don't know about your bankroll, but your heart and nerve won't stand for hundred-dollar pots when your antagonists are men."

"One antagonist risked his life to save mine," Jimmy declared, with an angry flush, for he thought he saw where the other's remarks led.

"I understand that is so," the doctor agreed. "My job's not to talk about your friends, but to give you good advice. Cut out unhealthy excitement and go steady. If you like it, go up on the rocks. Mountaineering's dangerous, but sometimes one runs worse risks."

He went off and by and by Deering came in.

"The doctor allows you are making pretty good progress. The man who means to put you out must use a gun," he said with a jolly laugh. "Anyhow, we were bothered and when we got the bulletin we rushed the bar for drinks."

"My friends are stanch."

"Oh, shucks!" said Deering. "You're the sort whose friends are stanch. Say, your holding on until I pulled you over was great!"

"You didn't pull me over. The stone rocked and I came off."

"One mustn't dispute with a sick man," Deering remarked. "All the same, I want to state I owe you much, and I pay my debts. I'd like you to get that."

Jimmy smiled. "If it's some comfort, I'm willing to be your creditor. I know you'd meet my bill."

"Sure thing," said Deering, who did not smile. "When you send your bill along, I'll try to make good. That's all; I guess we'll let it go."

"Very well. I don't see how you were able to stick to the slab."

"My foot slipped from the knob, but for a few moments you held me up, and bracing my knee

against the stone, I swung across for the crack. Then I was on the shelf and you went over my head. That's all I knew, until Stannard joined me and took control."

"He sent you off?"

Deering nodded. "I wasn't keen to go, but he saw help was wanted, and he thought about wiring for a doctor. When I got back with the boys, our plan was to rush you down to the hotel, but it wasn't Stannard's. I allow we were rattled; he was cool. We must go slow and not jolt you; at awkward spots somebody must look for the smoothest line. Crossing the glacier, he went ahead with the lantern and located a soft snow-bridge the guide was going to cross."

"Stannard is like that," said Jimmy. "His coolness is very fine."

Deering agreed, but Jimmy thought he hesitated before he resumed: "In some ways, the fellow's the standard type of highbrow Englishman. He's urbane and won't dispute; he smiles and lets you down. He wears the proper clothes and uses the proper talk. If you're his friend, he's charming; but that's not all the man. Stannard doesn't plunge; he calculates. He knows just where he wants to go and gets there. I guess if I was an obstacle, I'd pull out of his way. The man's fine, like tempered steel, and about as hard—— Well, the doctor stated you wanted quiet and I'll quit talking."

He went away and Jimmy mused. Deering talked much, but Jimmy imagined he sometimes had an object. Although he frankly approved

Stannard, Jimmy felt he struck a warning note. Since Jimmy owed much to Stannard's coolness, he was rather annoyed; but the talk had tired him and he went to sleep.

VII

AN INSURABLE INTEREST

THE sun was hot and Jimmy loafed in an easy chair at the shady end of the terrace. Laura occupied a chair opposite ; the small table between them carried some new books, and flowers and fruit from the Pacific coast. In the background, a shining white peak cut the serene sky.

Three or four young men and women were on the veranda steps not far off. A few minutes since they had bantered Jimmy, but when Laura arrived they went. Jimmy rather thought she had meant them to go and he gave her a smile.

" I expect you have inherited some of Mr. Stannard's talents," he remarked.

" For example ? "

Jimmy indicated the rather noisy group. " It looks as if you knew my head ached and I couldn't stand for Stevens's jokes. When you joined me he and his friends went off. Your father arranges things like that, without much obvious effort."

" I knew the doctor stated you must not be bothered," Laura admitted. " Besides, I engaged to go fishing with Stevens and some others, and before I get back expect I'll have enough."

"Is Dillon going?"

"Frank planned the excursion," said Laura, and Jimmy was satisfied.

Dillon was a young American, whom Jimmy rather liked, but to think Laura liked Frank annoyed him. Now, however, she had admitted that his society had not much charm.

"Anyhow, you're very kind," he remarked, and indicated the fruit and flowers. "These things don't grow in the mountains."

"The station is not far off and to send a telegram is not much bother."

"To send up things from Vancouver is expensive."

"Sometimes you talk like a cotton manufacturer," Laura rejoined.

Jimmy coloured but gave her a steady glance. "It's possible. My people are manufacturers; my grandfather was a workman. Not long since, I meant to cultivate out all that marked me as belonging to the cotton mill. Now I don't know—— Perhaps I inherited much that's useful from my grandfather; but in the meantime it's not important. You *are kind*."

"Oh, well," said Laura. "You were moody and the doctor declared you had got a very nasty jolt."

"I was thoughtful. To some extent you're accountable. When one is forced to loaf one has time to ponder, and when you inquired if I knew where I was drifting——"

He stopped, for a guide, carrying fishing-rods and landing-nets, went down the steps and Stannard came out of the hotel.

"Your party's waiting for you," Stannard remarked to Laura, who got up and gave Jimmy a smile.

"Get well and then ponder," she said and joined the others.

Jimmy frowned. The others, of course, ought not to wait for Laura, but Stannard had sent her off like that before. All the same, he was her father and Jimmy owned he must not dispute his rule. When the party had gone, Stannard sat down opposite Jimmy and lighted a cigarette.

"I'm glad to note you make good progress."

"In a day or two I'll go about as usual. In fact, if the others go fishing to-morrow, I'll try to join them. I think I could reach the lake."

"Some caution's necessary," Stannard remarked. "You got a very nasty shake and ran worse risks than you knew. When you stopped in the bank of gravel your luck was remarkably good; I did not expect you to stop until you reached the glacier. Then, had I not had a thick coat that helped to keep you warm, you might not have survived the shock. Afterwards much depended on Deering's speed and his getting men who knew the rocks. Indeed, when we started I hardly thought we could carry you down in useful time."

Jimmy was puzzled, because he did not think Stannard meant to imply that his help was important. The risk Jimmy had run, however, was obvious, and Stannard's talking about it led him to dwell on something he had recently weighed.

"Since I was forced to stop in bed I've tried to reckon up and find out where I am," he said.

"You are my banker. How does the account stand?"

"I imagine Laura's advice was good; wait until you get better," Stannard said carelessly.

"When I start to go about, I'll be occupied by something else. How much do I owe?"

For a few minutes Stannard studied his pocket book, and when he replied Jimmy set his mouth. He knew he had been extravagant, but his extravagance was worse than he had thought.

"Until I get my inheritance, it's impossible for me to pay you," he said with some embarrassment. "I, so to speak, have pawned my allowance for a long time in advance."

"Something like that is obvious."

"Very well! What am I going to do about it?"

"My plan was to wait until you did get your inheritance; but I see some disadvantages," said Stannard in a thoughtful voice.

"The trouble is, I might not inherit," Jimmy agreed. "One must front things, and climbing's a risky hobby. We mean to shoot a mountain sheep and I understand the big-horn keep the high rocks. Then we have undertaken to get up a very awkward peak. Well, suppose I did not come back?"

"You don't expect a fresh accident! Haven't you had enough? However, if your gloomy forebodings were justified, I expect your relations would meet my claim."

"After all, mountaineering accidents are numerous, and you don't know Dick Leyland. You have got a bundle of acknowledgments, but the notes are not stamped and Dick hates gambling.

It's possible he'd dispute my debts and he's a remarkably keen business man."

"If that is so, it might be awkward," Stannard agreed. "But what about the other trustee?"

"Sir James is in India; I expect he'd support Dick. During their lifetime my share is a third of the house's profit, but, unless they're satisfied, I cannot for some time use much control. In fact, they have power to fix my allowance."

Stannard's look was thoughtful, as if he had not known; but since Laura knew, Jimmy wondered why she had not enlightened her father.

"Very well," said Stannard. "My plan might not work. Have you another?"

The other plan was obvious. Jimmy was surprised because Stannard did not see it.

"You trusted me and I mustn't let you down," he said with a friendly smile. "If we insure my life, you'll guard against all risk."

"My interest is insurable——" Stannard remarked and stopped. Then he resumed in a careless voice: "Your caution's ridiculous, but if you are resolved, I suppose I must agree. In order to satisfy you, we'll look up an insurance office at Vancouver."

Somehow Jimmy was jarred. Stannard's remark about his insurable interest indicated that he had weighed the plan before, and Jimmy thought his pause significant. Then, although he had agreed as if he wanted to indulge Jimmy, his agreement was prompt. For all that, the plan was Jimmy's and Stannard's approval was justified.

Then Deering came along the terrace and said

to Stannard, "Hallo! I thought you had gone to write some letters, and Jimmy's look is strangely sober. Have you been weighing something important?"

The glance Stannard gave Jimmy was careless, but Jimmy thought he meant Deering was not to know.

"Sometimes Jimmy's rash, but sometimes he's keener than one thinks. Anyhow, he's obstinate and we were disputing about a suggestion of his I did not at first approve. I wrote the letters I meant to write. Sit down and take a smoke."

Deering sat down and they talked about the peaks they had planned to climb.

A week or two afterwards, Stannard and Jimmy went to Vancouver, and when he had seen the insurance company's doctor Jimmy walked about the streets. He liked Vancouver. When one fronted an opening in the rows of ambitious office blocks, one saw the broad Inlet and anchored ships. Across the shining water, mountains rolled back to the snow in the North; on the other side, streets of new wooden houses pushed out to meet the dark pine forest. The city's surroundings were beautiful, but Jimmy felt that beauty was not its peculiar charm.

At Montreal, for example, one got a hint of cultivation, and to some extent of leisure, built on long-established prosperity. Notre Dame was rather like Notre Dame at Paris and St. James's was a glorious cathedral. Quiet green squares checkered the city, and the streets at the bottom of the mountain were bordered by fine shade trees. Van-

couver was frankly raw and new; one felt it had not yet reached its proper growth. All was bustle and keen activity; the clang of locomotive bells and the rattle of steamboat winches echoed about the streets. Huge sawmills and stacks of lumber occupied the water-front. Giant trunks carried electric wires across the high roofs, and, until Jimmy saw the firs in Stanley Park, he had not thought logs like that grew.

Then he thought the citizens typically Western. Their look was keen and optimistic; they pushed and jostled along the sidewalks. Jimmy saw an opera house and numerous pool-rooms, but in the daytime nobody seemed to loaf. All struck a throbbing note of strenuous business. Jimmy studied the wharfs and mills and railroad yard, but for the most part he stopped opposite the land-agents' windows.

The large maps of freshly-opened country called. Up there in the wilds, hard men drove back the forest and broke virgin soil. Their job was a man's job and Jimmy pictured the struggle. He had loafed and indulged his youthful love for pleasure, but the satisfaction he had got was gone. After all, he had inherited some constructive talent, and he vaguely realized that his business was to build and not to squander. Then Laura and the doctor had worked on him. Laura had bidden him study whither he was tending; the other hinted that he went too fast.

At one office he saw a map of the country behind the hotel and he picked out the valley in which was Kelshope ranch. There was not another home-

stead for some distance and a notice stated that the land was cheap. Jimmy pondered for a few minutes and then went in.

The agent stated his willingness to supply land of whatever sort Jimmy needed, but he thought, for an ambitious young man, the proper investment was a city building lot. In fact, he had a number of useful lots on a first-class frontage. Jimmy studied the map and remarked that the town had not got there yet. The agent declared the town would get there soon, and to wait until the streets were graded and prices went up was a fool's plan. Jimmy stated he would not speculate; if the price were suitable, he might buy land in the Kelshope valley on the other map.

The agent said the valley was not altogether in his hands. Kelshope was in Alberta, but for a split commission he could negotiate a sale with the Calgary broker. If one bought a block and paid a small deposit, he imagined a good sum might stand on mortgage. Jimmy replied that he would think about it and went off. It was not for nothing he had studied business methods at the Leyland mill.

In the evening he and Stannard occupied a bench in the hotel rotunda. Cigar-smoke floated about the pillars; the revolving glass doors went steadily round, and noisy groups pushed in and out, but Stannard had got a quiet corner and by and by Jimmy asked: "Have you agreed with the insurance office?"

"They have not sent the agreement. I expect to get it."

"Then, I'd like you to go back in the morning

and insure for a larger sum. I'll give you a note for five hundred pounds."

"I have not five hundred pounds," said Stannard with surprise. "Why do you want the sum?"

"I'm going to buy a ranch near Jardine's," Jimmy replied. "The agent wants a deposit and I must buy tools. Can you help?"

Stannard looked at him hard and hesitated, but he saw Jimmy was resolved.

"I might get the money in three or four weeks. It will cost you something."

"That's understood," Jimmy agreed. "I don't, of course, expect the sum for which you'll hold my note. Will you get to work?"

"I rather think your plan ridiculous."

"You thought another plan of mine ridiculous, but you helped me carry it out," Jimmy said quietly.

Stannard looked up with a frown, for Deering crossed the floor.

"I've trailed you!" he shouted. "There's not much use in your stealing off."

"I didn't know you had business to transact in Vancouver," Stannard rejoined.

"Dillon had some business and brought me along," said Deering with a noisy laugh. "Looks as if my job was to guide adventurous youth."

Jimmy smiled, for he imagined the young men Deering guided paid expensive fees. He did not know if Deering's occupation was altogether gambling, but he did gamble and his habit was to win. Yet Jimmy liked the fellow.

"Jimmy's mood is rashly adventurous; he

wants to buy a ranch," Stannard resumed. "I understand he has interviewed a plausible land-agent."

"All land-agents are plausible," said Deering. "Tell us about the speculation, Jimmy."

Jimmy did so. Stannard's ironical amusement had hurt, and he tried to justify his experiment.

"Looks like a joke; but I don't know," said Deering. "If you can stand for holding down a bush block until the neighbourhood develops, you ought to sell for a good price. All the same, the job is dreary. Have you got the dollars?"

"I was trying to persuade Stannard to finance me. He doesn't approve, but thinks he could get the sum."

"That plan's expensive," Deering observed. "What deposit does the agent want?"

Jimmy told him and he pondered. Stannard said nothing, but Jimmy thought him annoyed by Deering's meddling. Moreover, Jimmy thought Deering knew. After a few moments Deering looked up.

"If you mean to buy the block, I'll lend you the deposit and you can pay me current interest. I expect the agent will take a long-date mortgage for the rest, but you ought to ask your trustees in England for the money."

"Have you got the sum?" Stannard inquired.

"Sure," said Deering, with a jolly laugh. "Dillon and I met up with two or three sporting lumber men who have just put over a big deal. My luck was pretty good, and I'd have stuffed my wallet had not a sort of Puritan vigilante blown in. He

got after the hotel boss, who stated his was not a red light house."

Jimmy studied the others, and although Stannard smiled, was somehow conscious of a puzzling antagonism. On the whole, he liked Deering's plan; he did not think Dick Leyland would agree, but Sir Jim might do so.

"Thank you, but Stannard's my banker," he replied. "All the same, in the morning I'll write to my trustees."

"Oh, well," said Deering. "If you want the dollars, I'm your man. But let's get a drink."

VIII

JIMMY GETS TO WORK

ON the evening Jimmy returned from Vancouver he went to the dining-room as soon as the bell rang and waited by Stannard's table. The table occupied a corner by a window, and commanded the room and a noble view of rocks and distant snow. Other guests had wanted the corner, but Stannard had got it for his party. Although he was not rich, Stannard's habit was to get things like that.

The room was spacious and panelled with cedar and maple. Slender wooden pillars supported the decorated beams, the tables were furnished with good china and nickel. The windows were open and the keen smell of the pines floated in.

After a few moments Jimmy heard Deering's laugh and Stannard's party crossed the floor. Frank Dillon talked to Laura, whom Jimmy had not seen since he returned; Frank was rather a handsome, athletic young fellow. Laura wore a fashionable black dinner dress and her skin, by contrast, was very white. Her movements were languidly graceful, and Jimmy got a sense of high cultivation. He was young and to know he belonged to Laura's party flattered him. Yet he was half

embarrassed, because he waited for other guests and did not know if Laura would like his friends. When she gave Jimmy her hand Stannard indicated two extra chairs.

"Hallo!" he said. "I must see the head waiter. This table's ours."

"Two friends of mine are coming," Jimmy replied and turned to Laura apologetically. "Perhaps I ought to have told you, but I wrote to Jardine from Vancouver and when I returned and got his letter you were not about."

"Was it not Miss Jardine you helped when her horse ran away?"

"I doubt if I did help much, but after the horse knocked me down I went to the homestead and Jardine was kind. Now I want to talk to him; he's a good rancher."

"Then, ranching really interests you?"

"Jimmy has bought a ranch and I'm going to stop with him," said Deering with a noisy laugh. "Perhaps to hunt and live the simple life will help me keep down my weight."

Laura gave Jimmy a keen glance and he thought she frowned. "You a rancher? It's ridiculous! But Deering likes to joke."

"It is not at all a joke," Deering rejoined. "Jimmy has bought a ranch, and Stannard and I disputed who should lend him the dollars. As a rule, one's friends don't dispute about that sort of privilege; but one trusts Jimmy. Perhaps his trusting you accounts for it."

"I suppose Miss Jardine comes with her father?" Laura remarked.

Jimmy agreed and looked at Stannard, who had picked up the bill of fare.

"We must wait for your friends," he said carelessly, but Jimmy thought him annoyed.

Then Jimmy turned and saw Margaret and Jardine. The rancher's clothes were obviously bought at a small settlement store, but his figure was good and his glance was keen and cool; somehow Jimmy imagined him ironically amused. Margaret's blue dress was not fashionable, but she carried herself like an Indian and was marked by something of the Indian's calm. In the sunset, her hair was red; her eyes were blue, and her skin was brown. When Jimmy advanced to meet her she gave him a frank smile. He presented her to Laura and noted Dillon's admiring glance.

Stannard beckoned a waiter and when dinner was served began to talk. Laura supported him, but Jimmy rather thought her support too obvious. This was strange, because Laura was clever and knew where to stop. Now it looked as if she did not. The Jardines were his friends, but nothing indicated that for them to dine at a fashionable hotel was embarrassing. He imagined Margaret studied Laura, and sometimes Laura's glance rested on the other for a moment and was gone. When Deering had satisfied his appetite, however, he firmly took the lead and Jimmy let him do so. Sometimes Deering's humour was rude, but it was kind.

When they went to the terrace others joined them and soon a party surrounded Stannard's table. After a time the people moved their chairs about and Jimmy saw Jardine was with Deering

and Dillon had joined Margaret. He fancied Laura had remarked this, but she lighted a cigarette and gave him a friendly smile.

"Your friends don't want you just now. When you started for Vancouver, I think you ought to have told me about your ranching experiment."

"I didn't know," said Jimmy in an apologetic voice. "I saw a map in a land-agent's window and something called. I hesitated for a few minutes and then went in."

"Then, you didn't go to Vancouver in order to buy a ranch?"

"Not at all——" said Jimmy and stopped, because he did not want to state why he did go. "Of course, it looks like a rash plunge," he resumed. "Still I doubt if it really is rash and I imagined you would approve."

Laura smiled. "I don't know much about ranching."

"Not long since you declared I ought to have an occupation."

"Then, you felt you must get to work because I thought you ought?" said Laura and gave Jimmy a gentle glance.

Jimmy's heart beat, but he knitted his brows. He was sincere and Laura was not altogether accountable for his resolve.

"Well," he said in a thoughtful voice, "I was getting slack and loafing along the easy way, until you pulled me up. I owe you much for that. You forced me to ponder and I began to see loafing was dangerous. One must have an object and I looked about——"

He stopped, with some embarrassment, and Laura saw he was moved. Jimmy did owe her something, for she had meddled at a moment when he was vaguely dissatisfied and looking for a lead. At the beginning, she was not selfish; she wanted him to stop and ponder, but he had started off again and was not going where she wanted him to go.

"You imply you have found an object?" she remarked. "After all, one's object ought to be worth while, and to chop trees on a ranch will not carry you far. Perhaps your proper occupation is at the cotton mill."

"I think not; anyhow, not yet. Until I'm twenty-five, Dick Leyland has control. Dick is a good mill manager, but his school is the old school. He holds down our work-people and they grumble; the machinery's crowded and some is not safe; the operatives have not the space and light that make work easier. Then the office is dark and cold. One can't persuade Dick that harshness and parsimony no longer pay. Well, when I go back I must have power to put things straight. The house is famous, my father built its fortune, and after all I'm its head."

Laura mused. She was poor, and hating poverty, had begun to weigh Jimmy's advantages. To marry the head of the famous house was a sound ambition, and she thought if she used her charm, Jimmy would marry her. He was young and in some respects argued like a boy; Laura was young, but she argued like a calculating woman. Yet she hesitated.

"But you have some power," she said and smiled. "Besides, you're obstinate."

"It's possible. All the same, I haven't tried my power and don't trust myself. Dick and I would jar, and when I couldn't move him I expect I'd get savage and turn down the job. When I have done some useful work, for example, cleared a ranch, got confidence and know my strength, I'll go back and try to take my proper part."

"Does one get the qualities you feel you want at a bush ranch?"

"Jardine has got a number. At Kelshope all is properly planned and stubbornly carried out. His labour's rewarded, and the important thing is, he is satisfied. I'm not, and I admit I haven't much ground to be satisfied."

"Oh, well," said Laura. "In a few days we start on our excursion to Puget Sound. I think you agreed to join us."

Jimmy knitted his brows. He wanted to join the party, but saw some obstacles.

"We talked about it. If I agreed, of course, I'll go."

"Because you agreed?"

"Not altogether. I'd like to go."

"Then why do you hesitate? We want you to join us."

"For one thing, I really don't think I did agree. Anyhow, you'll have Dillon. His home's on Puget Sound and I expect he's going."

"Frank is rather a good sort, but sometimes he bores one," Laura remarked carelessly. "Besides, after a time he's going to some friends in Colorado."

Jimmy's heart beat. Although he was not yet Laura's lover, her charm was strong. Still he ought to get to work, and if he went to Puget Sound with Laura, he might not afterwards bother about the ranch. Well, perhaps the ranch was not important; if he wanted, he could, no doubt, sell the land.

The clash of a locomotive bell, softened by the distance, echoed across the bush. A freight train had started from the water tank for the long climb to the pass and Jimmy felt the faint notes carried a message. Canada was a land of bells. At Montreal the locomotive bells rang all night; their tolling rolled across wide belts of wheat, and broke the silence that broods over the rocks. When all was quiet in the bush, the cow-bells rang sweet chimes. Perhaps Jimmy was romantic, but he felt the bells stood for useful effort, and now they called. The strange thing was, he thought he heard pine branches crack and Margaret's voice. "Oh, Buck! Oh, Bright!"

"I'm sorry, but I can't go," he said. "I have bought the ranch and must get to work."

Laura gave him a keen glance and got a jar. He frowned and his mouth was tight. She had thought she could move Jimmy, but now she doubted, and because she was proud she durst not try.

"Oh, well," she said, "we have talked for some time, and Deering has left Jardine."

She sent Jimmy off and looked about. Dillon talked to Margaret, and although Laura imagined a smile would detach him from the group, she did

not smile. After all, if Frank joined her, Jimmy might occupy the chair he left. Laura crossed the terrace and joined a young Canadian.

Jimmy sat down by the rancher and inquired: "Do you know the land I bought?"

"The soil is pretty good, but the timber's thick and until ye work oot the turpentine, ye'll no' get much crop. Ye'll need to chop and burn off the trees, grub the stumps, and then plough for oats and timothy. For some years, the oats will no' grow milling heads; ye cut them for hay."

"Looks like a long job. Suppose I wanted to sell the block after a time?"

"It depends," said Jardine drily. "Ye might get your dollars back."

"You imply it depends on the labour one uses?" Jimmy remarked. "Well, I know nothing about chopping and I haven't pulled a crosscut saw. Do you think I can make good?"

Jardine looked about the terrace and his eyes twinkled. He noted the men's dinner jackets and the women's fashionable clothes. People talked and laughed and smoked.

"I'm thinking your friends would not make good. Ye canna play at ranching."

"My object's not to play," said Jimmy in a quiet voice. "Anyhow, before you start to work you must get proper tools. Suppose you tell me what I need?"

Jardine did so and added: "Proper tools and stock are a sound investment, but ye canna get them cheap. Can ye put up the dollars?"

"I must borrow some," Jimmy admitted, and

thought Jardine studied Stannard, who talked to two or three young men not far off.

"Then, maybe ye had better borrow from Mr. Deering."

Jardine had said something like this before, but Jimmy let it go and the rancher indicated Margaret. Dillon leaned against a post opposite the girl and a group of young men and women occupied the surrounding chairs. A touch of colour had come to Margaret's skin; her look was alert and happy. Jimmy had known her undertake a man's job at the ranch, but on the hotel veranda she was not at all exotic.

"I must thank ye, Mr. Leyland. Sometimes it's lonesome at the ranch," Jardine remarked.

Jimmy said he hoped his guests would stop for some days, but Jardine refused.

"At Kelshope work's aye waiting and we'll start the morn. If ye come back wi' us, we'll look ower the block ye bought, and I might advise ye aboot layin' 't oot. In the meantime, we'll reckon up the tools and stock ye'll need——"

They began to talk about the ranch, and Stannard joined Laura, who sent off her companion.

"What do you think about Jimmy's experiment?" Stannard asked.

Laura studied him. On the whole, his look was careless, but she doubted.

"I don't know. Do you think him rash?"

Stannard shrugged. "My notion is, the thing's a rather expensive caprice, but after all, Jimmy's rich. He's easily moved and perhaps his bush friends have persuaded him."

"It's possible," Laura agreed. "All the same, Jimmy's keen. He really means to ranch."

"You have some grounds to know him keen?"

Laura's grounds were good and she wondered whether Stannard knew. Her father was clever and she saw his look was thoughtful.

"For one thing, he declares he cannot go with us to Puget Sound," she said.

"You imply he would sooner start for the bush with the Jardines?" Stannard suggested with a smile.

"After all, it's not important, and I expect Jimmy will go where he wants," said Laura, and went up the veranda steps.

She thought she had baffled Stannard, but she was hurt. At the beginning, she knew her advice to Jimmy was good. When he was going the wrong way she had stopped him. Now, however, it looked as if her power was gone. She could see herself Jimmy's guide in Lancashire, but to guide him in the lonely bush was another thing.

IX

THE QUIET WOODS

A WARM Chinook wind, blowing from the Pacific, carried the smell of the pines. The dark branches tossed and a languid murmur, like distant surf, rolled up the valley. Jimmy had pulled off his coat and his grey workman's shirt was open at the neck, for he liked to feel the breeze on his hot skin. He was splitting cedar for roof shingles, but had stopped in order to sharpen his axe. Since he had not yet cut his leg, he thought his luck was good.

A few maples, beginning to turn crimson, broke the rows of sombre pines. In the foreground were chopped trunks, blackened by fire, ashes and white chips. A tent and a half-built house of notched logs occupied the middle of the small clearing. In the background, one saw high rocks, streaked at their dark tops by snow. Some of the snow was fresh, and Jimmy imagined the speed he had used was justified. Yet, so long as the Chinook blew, gentle Indian summer would brood over the valley.

Jimmy's skin was brown, his mouth was firm, and his look alert. His hands were blistered and his back was sore, but this was not important. He

could now pull a big saw through gummy logs and, as a rule, drive the shining axe-head where he wanted it to go. A belt held his overalls tight at his waist; when he tilted back his head to get his breath his balance and pose were good.

A plume of aromatic smoke floated across the clearing and Okanagan Bob squatted by the fire. Bob's hair was black and straight and his eyes were narrow. His crouching pose was significant, because a white man sits. Bob's skin was white but it looked as if some Indian blood ran in his veins. He was an accurate shot and a clever fisherman. Now he fried trout for breakfast and Jimmy wondered whether he would leave the fish long enough in the pan. As a rule, Bob did not cook things much.

"Somebody's coming," he remarked and began to eat. "Take your fish when you want. I've got to pull out."

For a minute or two Jimmy heard nothing, and then a faint beat of horse's feet stole across the woods. The noise got louder and by and by Margaret rode into the clearing. When Jimmy jumped for his jacket she smiled and the nervous cayuse plunged. In the bush, all goes quietly and abrupt movement means danger.

Margaret rode astride. Her dress was dull yellow and her leggings were fringed deer-skin. At the hotel, Jimmy had approved her blue clothes, but he thought he liked her better in the bush. Somehow she harmonized with the straight trunks. It was not that she was finely-built and beautiful; one got a hint of primitive calm and strength.

" Shall I hold the bridle ? " Jimmy asked.

" I think not," said Margaret and soothed the horse. " Another time when you took the bridle I was forced to walk home and you got a kick."

" On the whole, I think my luck was good," Jimmy rejoined. " When I went to Kelshope, things, so to speak, began to move."

Margaret got down, took a pack from the saddle, and tied the horse to a tree. Bob got up from the fire, seized his rifle, and looked at Margaret.

" I'm going to get a deer," he said and vanished in the wood. The underbrush was thick, but they did not hear him go.

" When I was at the station the agent gave me your mail and some groceries," said Margaret. " My father allowed you were busy, and I'd better take the truck along."

Jimmy said, " Thank you," and gave her a thoughtful look. Margaret's voice was cultivated, but she talked like a bush girl. At the hotel she had not.

" I didn't order a fruit pie and a number of bannocks," he said when he opened the pack.

" Oh, well, I was baking, and I reckoned if Bob was cook, you wouldn't get much dessert. But have you eaten yet ? "

Jimmy said he imagined breakfast was ready and Margaret went to the fire, glanced at the half-raw trout, and threw a black, doughy cake from a plate.

" A white man *cooks* his food," she said meaningly. " Take a smoke while I fix something fit to eat."

Jimmy pushed two or three letters into his pocket and sat down on a cedar log. If Margaret meant

to cook his breakfast, he imagined she would do so and he was satisfied to watch her. For one thing, she knew her job, and Jimmy liked to see all done properly. She did not bother him for things; she seemed to know where they were. After a time, she put the trout and some thin light cakes on a slab of bark, and Jimmy remarked that the fish were an appetizing golden brown.

"I expect you have not got breakfast, and I'll bring you a plate," he said.

"At a bush ranch the woman gets the plates."

"There's not much use in pretending the bush rules are yours," Jimmy rejoined. "Anyhow, I'll bring you all you want."

"Wash the plate, please," said Margaret. "I'd sooner you did not rub it with the towel."

Jimmy laughed. "You take things for granted. I'm not a complete bushman yet."

He cleaned the plates and knives, and Margaret studied him. Something of his carelessness and the hint of indulgence she had noted were gone. His face had got thin and his frank glance was steady. Although he laughed, his laugh was quiet. The bush was hardening him, and when she looked about she saw the progress he had made was good. Well, she knew Jimmy was not a loafer; after the cayuse kicked his leg he carried her heavy pack to the ranch.

"Now we can get to work," he said.

Margaret allowed him to put a trout and some hot flapjacks on her plate.

"After all, I like it when people bring me things," she remarked. "At Kelshope, when one wants a

thing one goes for it. I reckon your friends ring a bell."

"Perhaps both plans have some drawbacks. Still I don't see why you bother to say that you do not ring bells."

"It looks as if you're pretty keen," said Margaret.

"Keener than you thought? Well, not long since I'd have admitted I was something of a fool. Anyhow, I rather think you know the Canadian cities."

"At Toronto I stopped at a cheap boarding-house. They rang bells for you. If you were not in right on time for meals, you went without. You didn't ask for the *menu;* you took what the waitress brought. Now you ought to be satisfied. I'm not curious about your job in the Old Country."

"I'm not at all reserved," Jimmy rejoined. "I occupied a desk at a cotton mill office, and wrote up lists of goods in a big book, until I couldn't stand for it. Then I quit."

Margaret weighed his statement and imagined he had used some reserve. For a clerk at a cotton mill to tour about Canada with rich people was strange.

"You talk about the *Old Country*, although you stated you were altogether Canadian," Jimmy resumed.

"My father's a Scot. He came from the Border."

"Your name indicates it. The Jardines and two or three other clans ruled the Western Border, but were themselves a stubborn unruly lot. Your ancestors were famous. I know their haunts in Annandale."

"I reckon my father was a poacher," Margaret observed.

Jimmy laughed. "It's possible the others were something like that. Anyhow, their main occupation was to drive off English cattle, but we won't bother——"

He stopped and mused. Sometimes, when he was at the cotton mill, he had gone for a holiday to the bleak Scottish moors. The country was romantic, but rather bleak than beautiful, and he had thought a touch of the old Mosstroopers' spirit marked their descendants. The men were big and their Scottish soberness hid a vein of reckless humour. They were keen sportsmen and bold poachers. When one studied them, one noted their stubbornness and something Jimmy thought was quiet pride. Margaret had got the puzzling quality; one marked her calm level glance and her rather haughty carriage. Although she was a bush rancher's daughter, Jimmy did not think he exaggerated much.

"Your house is going up and you have cleared some ground," she said. "It looks as if you had not slouched."

"Oh, well," said Jimmy modestly, "your father reckoned I must push ahead before the frost began; but if we have made some progress, I imagine Bob is mainly accountable."

"Do you like Okanagan?"

"I don't know," Jimmy replied in a thoughtful voice. "He stays with his job, and puts it over, but he doesn't talk. Unless he's chopping and you hear his axe, you don't know where he is. He

steals about. In fact, the fellow puzzles me. What's his proper business ? "

" Bob's a trapper. To get valuable skins you must go far North, but the black bear are pretty numerous and sometimes a cinnamon comes down the rocks. Then tourists give a good price for a big-horn's head. I reckon Bob's wad was getting big, until the politicians resolved to see the game laws were carried out. Now you must buy a license before you shoot large animals, and you may only shoot one or two. Then reserves are fixed where you may not shoot at all. The belt across the range is a reserve and the game-warden made some trouble for Bob. Perhaps this accounts for his hiring up with you."

" Do you like the fellow ? "

Margaret hesitated. She did not like Bob, but she did not mean to enlighten Jimmy. Sometimes Bob came to Kelshope and when he fixed his strange glance on her she got disturbed.

" Well," she said, " if I wanted a loghouse put up or the timber wolves cleared off, I'd send for Okanagan ; but I'd stop there. He's not the sort I'd want for a friend."

" You imply, if you were a rancher, you wouldn't want him for a friend ? "

Margaret's eyes twinkled. " Why, of course, I implied something like that."

" But Bob goes to Kelshope, and Mr. Jardine suggested my hiring him."

" My father's a bushman," said Margaret, rather dryly. " His habit's not to get stung ; but we'll let it go. What about your chickens ? "

Jimmy had sent for some poultry, and so long as Margaret was willing to stop, he was satisfied to talk about his flock. Sometimes the bush was lonely and to sit opposite Margaret had charm. She banished the loneliness and gave his rude fireside a homely touch. By and by, however, she got up.

"I have stopped some time and you ought to get busy."

She would not take his help to mount. She seized the bridle, stroked the cayuse, and was in the saddle. The horse plunged into the fern, Margaret waved her hand and vanished, but for a few minutes Jimmy smoked and pondered.

He thought Margaret harmonized with the quiet, austere woods, but although she talked like a bush girl, he wondered whether she had not done so in order to baffle him. Anyhow, he hoped she would come back and cook his breakfast another time. He could not see Laura Stannard beating up dough for flapjacks by his fire. Laura's proper background was an English drawing-room. She had grace and charm, and on the hotel terrace Jimmy was keen about her society. Then Laura was a good sort and he owed her much; the strange thing was, although she had stated he ought to follow a useful occupation, she did not approve his ranching experiment. In fact, she had urged him to go back to the cotton mill. Jimmy admitted he was rather hurt because she was willing for him to go. Now, however, her picture began to get indistinct. The bush called and Laura did not harmonize with the woods.

Then Jimmy remembered Margaret had brought him some letters and when he pulled out an envelope with an Indian stamp, his look was anxious. Sir James, however, stated that his London agents would send a cheque on a Canadian bank, and when Jimmy wanted to stock his ranch his bills would be met. Sir James remarked that to buy cattle was better than to bet on horses that did not win, and chopping trees was not, by contrast with some other amusements, very expensive. Moreover, if Jimmy got tired, he could sell the ranch. He added that he was presently going to Japan and afterwards to England by the Canadian Pacific line. When he crossed Canada, he would stop and look his nephew up.

Jimmy liked his uncle's rather dry humour, and admitted that some of his remarks were justified, for when Jimmy went to the races his luck was bad, but he put the letter in his pocket and picked up his axe. For some time he had talked and smoked and, unless he hustled, the shingles he wanted would not be split by dark.

X

LAURA'S REFUSAL

SMOKE rolled about the clearing and dry branches snapped in the flames. A keen wind fanned the blaze and in places the fire leaped up the trees and resinous needles fell in sparkling showers. Okanagan Bob went about with a coal-oil can, and Jimmy drove the red oxen that hauled loads of brush. Jimmy's face was black, his hand was burned, and his shirt was marked by dark-edged holes, but his mood was buoyant. The fire had got firm hold and advanced steadily across the belt of chopped trunks and branches bushmen call the *slashing*. When it burned out Jimmy thought only half-consumed logs would be left.

Perhaps his keenness was strange. To clear a ranch is a long and arduous job that he was not forced to undertake; but he was keen. His occupation, so to speak, had got hold of him. Moreover he felt, rather vaguely, it was a test of his endurance and pluck. Since he left the cotton mill he had loafed and squandered; now he had got a man's job, and when the job was carried out he would know himself a man.

By and by he stopped the oxen in front of the

house. A few yards off Deering notched the end of a log. He wore long boots, overall trousers and a torn shirt. His face was red, but his big body followed the sweep of the axe with a measured swing and the shining blade went deep into the log. Deering had arrived a few days before to arrange about a hunting excursion.

"You have put up a fresh log since I came along. You chop like a bushman," Jimmy remarked.

"Two logs," said Deering and dropped his axe. "I reckon I am a bushman. Anyhow I was born at a small Ontario ranch, and hired up at another in Michigan."

Jimmy was surprised. Although Deering was not at all like Stannard, his habits were extravagant and nothing indicated that he had engaged in bodily labour. He saw Jimmy's surprise and laughed.

"For a few minutes I'll cool off and take a smoke," he resumed. "Chopping's a healthy occupation, but I soon had enough. I was out for dollars and wasn't satisfied to earn two-and-a-half a day. Then in Canada, and I reckon in Michigan, you don't get two generations to stop on the land. You clear a ranch, but your son weighs all you're up against and resolves to quit. He reckons keeping store at a settlement is a softer job."

"Did you keep a store?"

"I ran a pool room. After a time, a women's reform guild got busy and the town reeve hinted I'd better get out."

Jimmy laughed. He liked Deering's frankness, but he said, "I suppose Dillon left Stannard at Puget Sound? He talked about going to Colorado."

"When we had stopped a week or two at the Dillon house, Frank reckoned he'd come back with us," Deering replied with some dryness. "Frank has not bought a ranch, but he's steadying up and I imagine Miss Laura has got after him. Anyhow, he's cut out cards and betting with me. Looks as if Miss Laura had some talent for steering young men into the proper track."

The blood came to Jimmy's skin, but Deering's humorous twinkle did not account for all. Jimmy did not like to think about Laura's steering Dillon; he felt Laura was his guide and not the other's.

"If you go back to the hotel in the afternoon, I'll come along," he said. "Perhaps I ought to see Stannard about our hunting trip."

"He stated he wanted to see you," Deering replied with a careless nod and resumed his chopping.

When the fire had burned out they started for the hotel, but they arrived after dinner and Laura was engaged with other guests. In the morning she went off to the lake with Dillon and one or two more whom Jimmy did not know, and since she did not suggest his joining the party, he loafed about the hotel. It looked as if she was satisfied with Dillon's society and did not want his.

Jimmy was hurt, and sitting on the terrace, he smoked and pondered. From the beginning he had felt Laura's charm, although he had not thought himself her lover; for one thing, he knew his drawbacks. Yet Laura liked Dillon, whose drawbacks were as obvious as his. Somehow Jimmy

had taken it for granted he had a particular claim to her friendship, but if the friendship must be shared with Frank its charm was gone.

After an hour or two his resolution began to harden. Perhaps his asking Laura to marry him was not as ridiculous as he had thought. At all events, he would take the plunge. She knew he had stopped loafing and started on a fresh line, and his having done so because she urged it was a useful argument. Jimmy admitted he did not see Laura helping at the ranch, but this was not important. So long as she engaged to marry him when he made good, he would be resigned. If she hesitated, he must try to suggest something like that.

In the evening Laura returned from the lake, but for some time after dinner she was engaged with her party and left Jimmy alone. Jimmy did not join the group, for the suspense bothered him and the others' light banter jarred. He thought it strange, but he felt he had nothing to do with the careless people whose society Laura enjoyed. When he had talked to Laura he was going back to the quiet woods.

At length Laura came along the terrace and Jimmy braced himself. She wore a black dinner dress and when a beam from the window touched her Jimmy thought her skin shone like the snow on the rocks. Then she turned her head and looked back. The tranquil movement was strangely graceful, but Jimmy frowned. Dillon had obviously meant to go with Laura, and although she motioned him back Jimmy knew she smiled. He fetched a chair and leaned against the terrace wall.

"Well, Jimmy," she said in a careless voice, "you don't look very bright."

"It's possible. You haven't talked to me for five minutes since I arrived."

"I was on the terrace. Had you wanted to join us, you could have done so."

"If you had wanted me, I expect you'd have indicated it."

"Sometimes you're rather keen," Laura remarked. "Still sometimes you are obstinate. I have known you do things I would sooner you did not."

"I expect I'm dull, for I don't know if you imply that my obstinacy would not have annoyed you. Anyhow, I left the ranch because I wanted to see you. I didn't want to stand about with the others and laugh at their poor jokes. They're a slack and careless lot."

Laura looked up. Jimmy's mouth was firm and she thought him highly strung. He was thin and hard and his pose was good. In fact, she felt he was not altogether the raw lad she had known.

"Not long since, you rather cultivated people like that and tried to use their rules," she said. "I think you made some progress."

"Oh, well, I own I was a fool and I owe you something because you helped me see my folly. To take the proper line at a ball and a dinner party, to shoot straight and play a useful game at cards is perhaps a sound ambition, but I begin to doubt if it's worth the effort it costs. In the woods, one gets another ambition."

Laura smiled. "You're impulsive. When one indicates the way for you to go, you go much faster

than one thinks, but we won't philosophize. Did it not cost you something to leave your ranch?"

"I wanted to see you," said Jimmy in a quiet voice. "I'd better state my object, because in a minute or two I expect your friends will come along——"

Laura thought not. The end of the terrace was not lighted. She and Jimmy were in the gloom and the others were not very dull.

"Well?" she said.

"I wanted to ask if you will marry me?"

For a few moments Laura said nothing and Jimmy noted that her pose was very quiet. Then she looked up.

"You are very young, Jimmy."

"I'm not younger than you. Besides, I don't see what my youth has to do with it."

"Your youth is a drawback," said Laura thoughtfully. "You will inherit a large fortune, but I am poor, and if I married you, your trustees would imagine I, and my father had planned to capture you."

"Now you are ridiculous!" Jimmy declared. "You have talent, beauty, and cultivation: I'm raw and know nothing but the cotton mill. You ought to see, if I can persuade you, the gain is altogether mine."

Laura gently shook her head. "I don't see it, Jimmy, and others would not."

"Dick Leyland might grumble," Jimmy admitted with a frown. "For all that, he has nothing to do with my marrying, and Sir Jim is another type. He'd fall in love with you——"

He stopped and Laura pondered. She must make a good marriage and the marriage Jimmy urged was good, but she saw some obstacles. For one thing, she did not love Jimmy. Ambition called, but she calculated. If he would take the line she thought he ought to take, she might agree.

"If you were at the cotton mill and claimed your proper post, all would be easier," she said. "Your uncles could not then dispute your right to marry whom you liked."

Jimmy's laugh was scornful. "My uncles control my fortune for a year or two; that's all. However, if you hesitate, I won't urge you to marry me yet. If you engage to do so when I get my inheritance, I'll be satisfied."

The blood came to Laura's skin. Jimmy's keenness was not remarkable, but she knew his sincerity and she forced a smile.

"You are philosophical."

"Oh, well," said Jimmy with some embarrassment, "I feel I ought not to urge you now. I wanted to know you belonged to me, and then I needn't bother when I'm at the ranch—— The trouble is, if I waited, somebody might carry you off. So long as you agree——"

Laura's look got rather hard. When she wanted him to go back to England she was not altogether selfish. Although she did not love him, she liked Jimmy, and felt he ought not to stop in Canada with Stannard and Deering.

"Then, you mean to go on at the ranch?" she said.

"Of course. You declare I'm young. I feel I

must take a useful job and, so to speak, make good. Besides, I can't go back to Lancashire to be ruled by Uncle Dick. When I take my inheritance, it will be another thing. Then, when you own a ranch, there's something about the woods that calls. You get keen ; to plan and work is not a bother."

"But is the reward for your labour worth while ? "

"In money, the reward is not worth while ; but that's not important. Somehow I know Dick Leyland is not carrying on the house's business as it ought to be carried on. We are getting rich, but we cannot much longer use his old-fashioned parsimonious rules. Jim's at Bombay, and there's no use in my making plans for Dick to oppose. You see, I have nothing to go upon. For five years I was a clerk, like our other clerks ; afterwards I was a careless slacker, and Dick would sternly put me down. But I've stated something like this before. You ought to see——"

Laura saw he had some grounds for his resolve to stop. Still she did not see herself helping at the ranch and to wait, for perhaps three or four years, while he carried out his rash experiment was not her plan. She imagined his trustees would not approve his marrying her and they controlled his fortune and were clever business men. Yet had she loved Jimmy, she might have agreed. In the meantime, he studied her with keen suspense, and getting up, she gave him a quiet resolute look.

"You must let me go," she said. "I like you, Jimmy, but I am not the girl for you."

Jimmy tried to brace himself and advanced as if he meant to touch her, but she stopped him.

"I ought not to return to Lancashire yet; but if that's the obstacle, I'll start when you like," he said, in rather a hoarse voice.

Laura was moved. In fact, she was moved to generosity. Now she had conquered, the strange thing was, she knew she must not use her triumph. Although Jimmy was beaten, she admitted his firmness at the beginning was justified, and she thought he would after a time repent.

"I see some other obstacles," she replied. "Since you are satisfied your proper job is in Canada, you must carry it out. There is no use in talking, Jimmy. I am not at all the girl for you."

Her resolution was obvious, and Jimmy stepped back. Laura gave him a friendly smile and went off. Jimmy frowned, for although he had doubted if he could persuade her, he had got a nasty knock. At the other end of the terrace Stannard joined Laura and glanced towards Jimmy.

"Well?" he said.

"Jimmy wanted me to marry him. I refused."

"Ah," said Stannard. "I suppose you had some grounds for your refusal?"

"I imagine he does not love me," Laura replied in a quiet voice.

Stannard studied her. Her colour was rather high, but she was calm. In some respects, she was like her mother and not like him. Stannard was satisfied it was so.

"Yet he asked you to marry him!"

"Perhaps I am attractive; but now I think

about it, he did not urge me much. For all that, Jimmy is a good sort."

For a few moments Stannard said nothing. Laura imagined he had meant her to marry Jimmy and her refusal bothered him. Yet his look rather indicated resignation than anger. She really did not know her father, but he was kind.

" Jimmy is a good sort," he remarked. " He has some other advantages."

" His advantages are obvious ; he's sincere and frank and generous," Laura agreed with a touch of emotion. " Had he not been like that, I might have risked it."

Stannard shrugged. " Perhaps you're not altogether logical ; but it's done with."

" I'm sorry, father," said Laura in a gentle voice and went up the steps.

Stannard stopped and his look was sternly thoughtful. He was an adventurer and his scruples were not numerous, but he had not used his daughter's beauty as he might have used it. Now he knew he ran some risks and, for her sake, he had wanted her to marry Jimmy. Well, she had refused, and Jimmy owed him much, but for some time could not pay. Stannard lighted a cigar and knitted his brows.

XI

THE GAME RESERVE

AT the end of the small open glade the pack-horses dragged about their ropes. A short distance in front, the thick timber stopped and a mountain spur went up to the dim white peaks. The sun had gone and the sky was calm and green. One heard a river brawl and a faint wind in the trees. Deering lay in the pine needles and rubbed his neck.

"The mosquitos are fierce. Throw some green stuff on the fire and make a smoke," he said. "I don't want to get up."

Jimmy, sitting on a log, pushed green branches into the flames, and then turned his head and looked about. Two Indians were cutting poles and putting up a tent. In the gaps between the trunks the gloom got deep, and although the sharp top of the spur was distinct, Jimmy only saw a few small pines and junipers. Stannard and Okanagan Bob, who had gone up in the afternoon to look for a line to the high rocks, were not coming yet. The horses could not go farther and in the morning the hunting party would leave them behind.

"They recently let me join a highbrow mountain

club; but when I start for the rocks I hesitate," Deering resumed. "To boost two hundred pounds up crags and glaciers is a strenuous job, and I allow I'd sooner Stannard had brought the hotel guides. When I camp I like two blankets and a square meal. A good guide can carry a lot of useful truck."

"Their charges are high and Okanagan claims he knows the big-horn's haunts."

"Somehow I reckon Bob knows too much," Deering rejoined. "Well, I allow to let you break your neck wouldn't pay Stannard."

"In one sense, it wouldn't cost him much," said Jimmy, with a laugh. "You see, I insured my life in his favour some time since."

"Ah," said Deering, thoughtfully. "That was when he took you down to Vancouver?"

"I went down. The plan was mine. After I fell into the gully, I saw Stannard ran some risk."

Deering grinned. "I like you, Jimmy! You're sure an honest kid." Then his glance got keen and he resumed: "Say, are you going to marry Laura?"

"Miss Stannard refused to marry me," Jimmy replied in a quiet voice. "But we were talking about the insurance. I rather urged Stannard——"

"Exactly! Stannard's a highbrow Englishman," said Deering, but somehow Jimmy thought his remark ironical. "Well, you urged, and since Stannard is not rich, he agreed? Perhaps the strange thing is he was able to lend you a pretty good sum. Do you know where he gets the dollars?"

"I don't know. It's not important."

"Oh, well! You have insured your life and

Miss Laura has refused you! She's a charming girl, but since I don't see her helping you run a bush ranch, perhaps her refusal was justified. However, I think somebody's coming down the ridge."

Not long afterwards Stannard and Bob reached the camp and Stannard said, "We have found a line and we'll start at daybreak. Bob now declares he expects a reward for each good head we get."

"You can promise him his bonus. If we shoot a big-horn, we're lucky; the tourist sports have scared them back to the North," Deering remarked.

They got supper and went to bed. The spruce twigs were soft and the Hudson's Bay blankets were warm, but for a time Jimmy did not sleep. The tent door was hooked back and the night was not dark. He saw the smoke go up and the mist creep about the trunks. Sometimes a horse broke a branch and sometimes the river's turmoil got louder, but this was all and Jimmy missed the cow-bells that chimed at Kelshope ranch.

Perhaps it was strange, but Laura's refusal had not hurt him very much. In fact, he began to feel that so long as she did not marry Dillon he would be resigned. Now Jimmy came to think about it, Deering's hint that she attracted Frank to some extent accounted for his resolve to marry Laura Anyhow, Laura was his friend, and Stannard had used tact. He was quietly sympathetic and soon banished Jimmy's embarrassment. Then the noise of the river got indistinct and Jimmy thought he heard cow-bells ring. Branches cracked and somebody called, "Oh, Buck! Oh, Bright!"

At daybreak Bob sent off two Indians to wait for the party at another spot. He and an Indian carried heavy loads, but all carried as much as possible, because Bob declared the party was rather large for good hunting and refused to take another man. When they stopped at noon Deering's face was very red and Jimmy was satisfied to lie in the stones while Bob brewed some tea.

After lunch they pushed through a belt of timber. The trees were small, but some had fallen and blocked the way. Others, broken by the wind, had not reached the ground and the locked branches held up the slanted trunks. Where the underbrush below was thick, one must crawl along the logs.

On the other side of the timber an avalanche had swept the slope, carrying down soil and stones, and the party was forced to cross steep rock slabs. Jimmy carried a rifle, a blanket, and a small bag of flour and admitted that he had got enough. To pitch camp at sunset behind a few half-dead spruce was a keen relief.

They had not a tent and the cold was keen, but where one can find wood one can build a shelter. Supper was soon cooked and when they had satisfied their appetite all were glad to lie about the fire. Some distance above them, untrodden snow, touched with faint pink by the sunset, glimmered against the green sky. Below, rocks and gravel went down to the forest, across which blue mist rolled. Sometimes a belt of vapour melted and one saw a vast dim gulf and a winding line that was a river. The austere landscape rather braced than

daunted Jimmy. He knew the Swiss rocks and the high snows called.

Two days afterwards Jimmy, one afternoon, got his first shot at a mountain-sheep. Until the big-horn moved, it looked like a small grey stone, but it did move and when it vanished they studied the ground. There was no use in trying a direct approach, but the rocky slope was broken and Bob judged they could climb a gully and come down near the animal farther on. They must, however, take their loads, because he had not yet found a spot to pitch camp.

To climb the gully, embarrassed by a heavy pack, and a rifle, was hard, and for some time afterwards they crawled across the top of a big buttress. When they reached another gully the sun was gone, but Bob thought they would find the sheep not far from the bottom. He said two might go, and when they had spun a coin Stannard and Jimmy took off their packs.

The gully was very steep and they used some caution. Jimmy's heart beat. Near the bottom he slipped and might have gone down had not Stannard steadied him. Bob, carrying the glasses, went a short distance in front. At the bottom he got behind a stone and presently waved his hand.

When Jimmy reached the spot he saw a horse-shoe slope of rock and gravel that fell sharply for five or six hundred feet and then stopped, as if at the edge of a precipice. He thought if the big-horn went down there, they must let it go. Then Bob touched his arm and indicated a spot level with them, but some distance off. Something

moved and Jimmy, taking the glasses, saw it was a sheep.

"Your shot. Use a full sight; it's farther than you think," said Stannard in a low voice, and when Jimmy had pulled up the slide he rested the rifle barrel on the rock.

His arm was on the stone; he knew he ought to hold straight, but the shot was long and the hole in the telescopic sight was small. Perhaps he was too keen, for although Stannard had got a noble head, he himself had not yet fired a shot, but when he began to pull the trigger his hand shook. He stopped and drew his breath, and the sheep moved.

"He's going," said Bob and Jimmy crooked his finger.

The rifle jerked. In the distance, a small shower of dust leaped up and the sheep jumped on a stone. In a moment it would vanish and Jimmy savagely snapped out the cartridge. Then he saw a pale flash and knew the report of Stannard's English rifle. The sheep plunged from the stone, struck the ground, and began to roll down the incline. Its speed got faster and Jimmy thought it went down like a ball. In a few moments it would reach the top of the precipice, and if it plunged across they would not find its broken body. Then it struck a rock and stopped, so far as one could see, a few yards from the edge. Stannard gave Bob his rifle and picked up the glasses.

"A fine head! Call Deering, Jimmy. I think we can get down."

Jimmy thought not, but he shouted and Deering arrived and studied the ground.

"Looks awkward, but perhaps we can make it."

"You have got to make it! You don't want to leave a sheep like that about," said Bob.

Stannard gave him a keen glance, but Deering said. "Let's try; I've brought the rope. If you'll lead, Stannard, I'll tie on at the top. We'll leave Jimmy."

"Since I missed my shot, I ought to go," Jimmy objected.

"My weight's a useful anchor and you're not up to Stannard's form," Deering rejoined and they put on the rope.

They started and Jimmy lighted his pipe. He had wanted the noble head and Stannard had got another, but Jimmy was not jealous. Although Stannard had hardly had a moment before the sheep went off, he had seized the moment to shoot and hit. In the meantime, however, the others were getting down the slope and Jimmy used the glasses.

The job was awkward. Sometimes the stones ran down and Stannard hesitated; Deering stopped and braced himself, ready to hold up his companions. Bob was at the middle of the rope and, so far as one could see, was satisfied to follow Stannard. They reached the sheep, and Bob got on his knees by the animal. His knife shone and after a few minutes he gave Stannard the head.

Then it looked as if they disputed, but Bob got up and began to drag the sheep to the edge. Jimmy was puzzled, for stones were plunging down and it was plain the fellow ran some risk. One could not see his object for resolving to get rid of the

headless body. After a minute or two he pushed the sheep over the edge and the party began to climb the slope.

They got to the top, and going up the gully, after a time found a corner in the rocks and pitched camp. Bob and the Indian had carried up a small quantity of wood and when they cooked supper Stannard remarked: "I expect you're satisfied, nobody in the valley could see our fire."

"Nobody's in the valley, anyhow," said Bob.

"Then, my seeing smoke was strange," Stannard rejoined.

"But suppose somebody had camped in the trees? Why shouldn't the fellow see our fire?" Jimmy inquired.

"Perhaps Bob will enlighten you," said Stannard coolly.

"Ah," said Deering, "he didn't mean to leave the sheep around, and although I didn't get his object for pushing the body off the rocks, I reckon it went down a thousand feet into the timber——" He stopped and looking hard at Bob resumed: "What was your object?"

Bob's dark face was inscrutable.

"I saw smoke. When we got busy, I calculated the game-warden had located at the other end of the range."

"You greedy swine!" said Stannard, and Deering began to laugh.

"Jimmy doesn't get it! Well, Bob meant to earn his bonus, and since he took us shooting on a government game reserve, I admit his nerve is pretty good. Anyhow, I won't grumble because

I haven't killed a big-horn. Stannard's may cost him two or three hundred dollars."

"Why did you play us this shabby trick, Bob?" Jimmy asked in a stern voice.

Bob gave him a rather strange look.

"I sure wanted the bonus and the reserve is new. I allowed I'd beat the warden and you wouldn't know. He got after me another time and I had to quit and leave a pile of skins."

"You wanted to get even?" Deering remarked and turned to Stannard. "What are you going to do about it? In a way, the thing's a joke, but our duty's obvious. We ought to give up the heads and take Bob along to the police."

Stannard said nothing, but Jimmy imagined he did not mean to give up the heads. Bob's calm was not at all disturbed.

"Shucks!" he said. "You're pretty big, Mr. Deering, but I reckon the city man who could take me where I didn't want to go isn't born. Why, you can't get off the mountains unless I help you fix camp and pack your truck!"

"I don't like packing a heavy load," Deering admitted. "We'll talk about it again, and in the meantime you had better take the frypan from the fire. I hate my bannocks burned."

XII

STANNARD FRONTS A CRISIS

AT Kelshope ranch fodder was scarce and so long as the underbrush was green Jardine let his cattle roam about. The plan had some drawbacks, and Jardine, needing his plough oxen one afternoon, was forced to search the tangled woods. Sometimes he heard cowbells, but when he reached the spot the animals were gone. A plough ox is cunning and in thick timber moves much faster than a man.

Jardine, however, was obstinate and for an hour or two he pushed on across soft muskegs and through tangled brushwood. When at length he stopped he saw he had torn his new overalls and broken an old long boot. Besides, he hated to be baffled and since he could not catch the oxen he could not move some logs.

When he got near the ranch he stopped. Somebody was quietly moving about the house, as if he wanted to find out who was at home, and Jardine, advancing noiselessly, saw it was Bob. He admitted he had expected something like that, for Bob's habits were not altogether a white man's. Jardine imagined he did not know Margaret had gone to the railroad.

Had he found his team, he might have given Bob supper and sent him off before Margaret arrived, but he had not found the team and Bob's creeping about the house annoyed him. In the Old Country Jardine was a poacher, but he sprang from good Scottish stock and he hated to think Bob bothered Margaret. Moving out of the shadow, he went up the path.

He did not make a noise, but Bob turned, and Jardine thought had the fellow been altogether a white man he would have started. Bob did not start. His look was calm, like an Indian's, and his pose was quiet.

"Hallo!" he said. "I reckoned you'd gone after your plough team."

"Ye didna reckon I'd come back just yet!"

Bob smiled, but his eyes got narrower and his mouth went straight. He was a big man and carried himself like an athlete.

"Well," he said, "I allowed Miss Margaret was around and I'd wait a whiles."

Jardine wondered whether Bob meant to annoy him. As a rule the fellow was not frank and now his frankness was insolent.

"If ye come another time, ye'll come when I'm aboot. What have ye in yon pack?"

"Berries," said Bob, opening a cotton flour bag. "I reckoned Miss Margaret wanted some. Then I brought a pelt; looked the sort of thing to go round her winter cap."

In the woods, the Indians dry the large yellow raspberries and Bob had brought a quantity to the ranch before. Now he pulled out a small

dark skin that Jardine imagined was worth fifty dollars. The value of the present was significant.

"Ye can tak' them back. We have a' the berries we want."

"Anyhow, I guess Miss Margaret would like the skin."

"She would not. Margaret has nae use for ony pelts ye bring."

For a few moments Bob was quiet. Then he said, "Sometimes I blew in for supper and you let me stop and smoke. When you put up the barn, you sent for me to help you raise the logs. The English tenderfoot hadn't located in the valley then."

The blood came to Jardine's skin. To some extent Bob's rejoinder was justified; but Jardine had not until recently imagined Margaret accounted for the fellow's coming to the ranch.

"When we put up the barn ye got standard pay. I allow ye're a useful man to handle logs, but I'm no' hiring help the noo."

"You reckoned me your hired man?" said Bob in an ominously quiet voice. "That was all the use you had for me?"

"Just that!" Jardine agreed. "Margaret has nae use for ye ava'."

"Then, if you reckon you're going to get my highbrow English boss for her, you're surely not very bright. His sort don't marry——"

"Tak' your pack and quit," said Jardine sternly. "Get off the ranch, ye blasted half-breed!"

Bob was very quiet, but his pose was alert and somehow like a hunting animal's. Perhaps instinctively, he felt for his knife. Jardine's axe leaned

against a neighbouring post. If he jumped, he could reach the tool, but he did not move. For a moment or two they waited, and then Bob picked up the flour bag and went down the path. Jardine went to the kitchen and lighted his pipe. Bob was gone, and Jardine hardly thought he would come back, but he was not altogether satisfied he had taken the proper line. Indian blood ran in Bob's veins; an Indian waits long and does not forget. For all that, Jardine did not see himself warning Leyland and enlightening Margaret.

A week afterwards, Stannard one evening occupied a chair at his table on the terrace. He had returned from the mountains with two good bighorn heads and nothing indicated that the game-warden knew the party had poached on the reserve. Stannard, however, was not thinking about the hunting excursion. The English mail had arrived and sometimes he studied a letter and sometimes looked moodily about.

Laura, Dillon, and two or three young men occupied the steps that went down to the woods. Laura wore her black dinner dress and Stannard thought she had not another that so harmonized with her beauty. Dillon obviously felt her charm. He was next Laura, and since it looked as if the others were ready to dispute his claim to the spot, Stannard imagined Frank would not have occupied it unless Laura meant him to stop.

After a time Stannard pushed the letter into his pocket and gave himself to gloomy thought, until Deering came along the terrace and asked him for a match.

"You look as if you were bothered," Deering remarked.

"Sometimes one is bothered when one's mail arrives."

"That is so," said Deering, with a sympathetic nod. "Opening your mail is like dipping in a lucky bag; your luck's not always good. I got some bills in my lot."

"I got a demand for a sum I cannot pay. I expect you have not two thousand dollars you don't particularly need?"

Dillon laughed. "Search me! All I've got above five hundred dollars you can have for keeps. Looks as if you must put the fellow off."

"He's obstinate and until he's satisfied I run some risk," said Stannard in a quiet voice.

"Then, you had better try Dillon. The kid's rich and sometimes generous," Deering remarked. "In a sense, he's mine, but since you're up against it, I'll lend him you."

He went off and Stannard frowned. For him to be fastidious was ridiculous, but Deering's frankness jarred. Still he needed a large sum, and although he could borrow for Jimmy, he could not borrow for himself; the fellow who supplied him was a keen business man. Stannard lived extravagantly, but the money he used was not his, and unless he justified the speculation supplies would stop. So far, the speculation had paid and he owned he ought not to be embarrassed. The trouble was, he squandered all he got.

He weighed Deering's plan. Dillon's father was rich and indulged the lad. Stannard had stopped

at his ambitious house on Puget Sound, and imagined the old lumber man approved Laura. In fact, the drawback to Deering's plan was there. Stannard had not bothered much about Laura and was willing for his wife's relations to undertake his duty, but he did not mean to put an obstacle in her way. She must make a good marriage; after all her aunts were poor.

By and by the group on the steps broke up and Laura came to Stannard's table. He noted that her eyes sparkled and her colour was rather high. It looked as if she had triumphed over another girl; Stannard admitted the others were attractive, but none had Laura's charm.

"You have soon forgotten Jimmy," he remarked.

"No," said Laura, "I have not forgotten Jimmy. Although I did not want him for a lover, he's my friend. But he really was not my lover. That accounts for much."

"Yet I imagine, if he had been persuaded to go back to the cotton mill——"

Laura blushed, but she gave Stannard a steady look. "I liked Jimmy, father, and I was not altogether selfish. I felt he ought to go back."

"To lead a young man where he ought to go is rather an attractive part," Stannard remarked. "Jimmy wanted to marry you. What about Frank Dillon?"

"Ah," said Laura. "Frank is not as rash as Jimmy! Jimmy doesn't ponder. He plunges ahead."

"You imply that Frank uses caution."

"Oh, well," said Laura, smiling, "perhaps I use some reserve."

Stannard thought her voice was gentle, and turning his head, he studied Dillon. The young fellow stood at the top of the steps as if he wanted to follow Laura, but waited for her to indicate that he might. Stannard reflected with dry amusement that Laura kept her lovers in firm control. Frank was rather a handsome fellow and Stannard knew him sincere and generous. Perhaps it was strange, but a number of the young men he admitted to his circle were a pretty good type. Although Stannard was not bothered by scruples, he was fastidious.

"But I want to know—— It's important," he said. "Suppose Frank is as rash as Jimmy? Will you refuse him?"

Laura blushed, but after a moment or two she looked up and fronted her father.

"Why is it important for you to know?"

Stannard hesitated. He had not used his daughter for an innocent accomplice, and had she married Jimmy he would have tried to free the lad from his entanglements. Now, if she loved Frank, he must not embarrass her.

"Well," he said, "I rather think I must give you my confidence. I need money and it's possible Frank would help."

"Oh, father, you mustn't use Frank's money!" Laura exclaimed and, since her disturbance was obvious, Stannard's curiosity was satisfied. "He's your friend and trusts you," she resumed. "I think you ought to force Deering to leave him alone."

For a few moments Stannard was quiet. Laura loved Frank; at all events she was willing to marry him, and it looked as if she knew more about her father than he had thought. Well, Laura was not a fool.

"You use some tact," he remarked. "I wonder whether you really think Deering a worse friend for Frank than I? However, we'll let it go. If you marry the young fellow, he, of course, ought not to be my creditor."

Laura gave him a grateful look and when she replied her voice was apologetic. "Perhaps I wasn't justified, but I felt I was forced—— I mean, I didn't want you to bother Frank, and one cannot trust Deering."

"I think I see," Stannard rejoined. "Well, perhaps Deering's a better sort than you think. He stated, rather generously, that he would lend me Frank, but if it's some comfort, I'll engage not to bother the young fellow."

"You're a dear!" said Laura with a touch of emotion.

Stannard shrugged. "I have not carried out my duty and you do not owe me much, but after all it was for your sake I sent you to your aunts. Since your father was a bad model, I hoped your mother's sisters would help you to grow up like her. Well, since I long neglected you, I must not now put an obstacle in your way."

"You are kind," said Laura. "Perhaps I'm cold and calculating. I know my shabbiness, but I did not love Jimmy and I think I do love Frank."

She touched Stannard's arm gently and went

into the hotel. A few moments afterwards, Dillon crossed the terrace and went up the steps. Stannard smiled, but by and by threw away his cigar and knitted his brows. He thought he need not bother about Laura, but he saw no plan for meeting his importunate creditor's demands.

XIII

THE DESERTED HOMESTEAD

STANNARD and a party from the hotel were in the mountains, and Laura and Mrs. Dillon one morning occupied a bench on the terrace. Mrs. Dillon had arrived a few days since, and when Stannard returned Laura was going back with her to Puget Sound. Dillon, sitting on the steps, tranquilly smoked a cigarette. Laura had engaged to marry him and he had refused to join Stannard's rather ambitious excursion to a snow peak that had recently interested the Canadian Alpine Club. So far as Dillon knew, nobody had yet got up the mountain, and if its exploration occupied Stannard and Jimmy for some time, he would be resigned. Jimmy was his friend, but on the whole Frank would sooner he was not about.

"Two strangers went into the clerk's office some time since," Laura said presently. "One wore a sort of cavalry uniform. Do you know who they are?"

"One's a subaltern officer of the Royal North-West Mounted Police," Dillon replied. "I expect the other's a small boss in the Canada forestry department, or something like that. Perhaps a careless tourist has started a bush fire."

"They are coming out," said Laura, and added with surprise: "I think they want to see us."

The men crossed the terrace and the young officer gave Laura an envelope.

"I understand you are Miss Stannard and this is your father's."

Laura signed agreement and studied the envelope. The address was Stannard's and at the top was printed, *Sports service. Taxidermy.*

"Perhaps you had better open the envelope," the officer resumed.

Laura did so and pulled out a bill. "To preserving and mounting two big-horn heads—— To packing for shipment——"

The other man took the bill. He was a big brown-skinned fellow and his steady quiet glance indicated that he knew the woods.

"Sure!" he said. "The charge for packing is pretty steep; but when you mean to beat the export-prohibition—— Well, I guess this fixes it!"

"What has Mr. Stannard's bill to do with you?" Laura asked in a haughty voice.

"To begin with, he can't ship those heads out of Canada. Then it looks as if he killed the big-horn on a government game reserve."

"Your statement's ridiculous," said Laura angrily. "My father is an English sportsman, not a poacher."

"Anyhow, he killed two mountain sheep not long since."

"You cannot force Miss Stannard to admit it," Dillon interrupted.

"Not at all," the young officer agreed politely. "Still I think some frankness might pay. My companion is warden Douglas, from the reserve, and the game laws are strict, but it's possible some allowance would be made for tourists who did not know the rules. If Miss Stannard does reply, it might help."

"Very well," said Laura. "My father and a party went shooting and he brought back two big-horn heads, but I'm satisfied he did not know he trespassed on a game reserve."

"His partners were Leyland and Deering," warden Douglas remarked. "I expect they took a guide, although they didn't hire up the men at the hotel."

"Mr. Leyland's man, Okanagan, went."

Douglas looked at the officer and smiled meaningly. "Now I get it! I reckon Bob *played* them fellers."

"Mr. Stannard is again in the mountains?" the officer said to Laura. "I don't urge you to reply, but although my duty's to find out all I can, I don't think your frankness will hurt your father."

Laura said Stannard had gone to climb a famous peak and admitted that he had taken Okanagan.

"They'll hit the range near the head of the reserve and a hefty gang could get down the Wolf Creek gulch," Douglas observed. "Looks as if Bob had gone back for another lot! I guess an English sport would put up fifty dollars for a good head."

"Thank you, Miss Stannard," said the officer. The department will claim the heads and perhaps

demand a fine, but the sum will depend upon Mr. Stannard's statements. This, however, is not my business."

He bowed and went off, but stopped Douglas on the veranda.

"If you want to go after the party, I'll give you trooper Simpson."

"I'm going after Okanagan and I mean to get him," said Douglas grimly. "I reckon he fooled the tourists, but they've got to pay the fine. Can't you give me a bushman trooper? Okanagan's a tough proposition and he doesn't like me."

The officer said he had not another man and must go off to make inquiries about a forest fire. He sent for his horse and the group on the terrace saw him ride down the trail.

"I'm sorry for father and know he'll hate to give up the heads; but I think the men were satisfied Jimmy's helper cheated him," Laura remarked.

A few days afterwards, Stannard's party stopped one evening at a small, empty homestead. Thin forest surrounded the clearing, but on one side the trees were burned and the bare rampikes shone in the sun. In places the crooked fence had fallen down, tall fern grew among the stumps and willows had run across the cultivated ground. For all that, the loghouse was good, and since the horses could not go much farther, Stannard resolved to use the ranch for a supply depôt. On the rocks the climbing party could not carry heavy loads.

When the sun got low they sat on the veranda and smoked. They did not talk much, and Jimmy felt the brooding calm was melancholy. Some-

body, perhaps with high hope, had cleared the ground the forest now was taking back. Labour and patience had gone for nothing; the grass was already smothered by young trees. It looked as if the wilderness triumphed over human effort.

"How long do you think its owner was chopping out the ranch? And why did he let it go?" Jimmy asked.

"I reckon nine or ten years," Deering replied. "Maybe he speculated on somebody's starting a saw-mill or a mine. Maybe the block carried a mortgage and he pulled out to earn the interest. As a rule, the small homesteader takes any job he can get, and when his wallet's full comes back to chop, but a railroad construction gang's the usual stunt and some don't come back. I expect the fellow was blown up by dynamite or a rock fell on him. Anyhow, when you hit a deserted ranch, the owner's story is something like that. Canada's not the get-rich-quick country land boomers state."

Then Deering turned to Stannard. "Did you find a good line to the ridge from which we reckon to make the peak?"

"I found a line I think will go. You follow the ridge until a big buttress breaks the top some distance above the snow level. A *col* goes down to a glacier and one might get across to another ridge that would help us up the peak. Still I doubt if our map's accurate, and my notion is to climb the buttress."

Deering took the map. "Good maps of the back country are not numerous, but if the *col*'s

where you locate it, I reckon the old-time miners shoved up the glacier when they came in from the plains. Some made the Caribou diggings from Alberta long before the railroad was built."

"Their road was rough," said Stannard and lighted his pipe.

He was not keen to talk. For one thing, he was tired, and he did not yet know where to get the sum he needed. The sum, however, must be got. So long as he belonged to one or two good clubs and visited at fashionable country houses, the allowance on which he lived would be paid; but if he did not satisfy his creditor he must give up his clubs and would not be wanted at shooting parties.

By and by Deering signed Bob, who was cleaning a rifle.

"We have got guns. Have you got a pit-light?"

Bob grinned. "You can't use a pit-light. Some cranks at Ottawa allow they're going to carry out the law."

"It depends," said Deering drily. "I wouldn't go still-hunting if I thought a game-warden was about, but we oughtn't to run up against a warden in this neighbourhood. Anyhow, I see the deer come down to feed on the fresh brush, and some venison would help out our salt pork. Say, *have you got a light?*"

"I've got one," Bob admitted. "We brought some candles, and I guess I could cut two or three shields from a meat can."

"Then you can get to work," said Deering, and turned to the others. "The sport's pretty good.

You hook a small miner's lamp in your hat and pull out the brim, but you can use a candle and a bit of tin. Since the lamp's above the tin shield, the deer can't see you. They see a light some distance from the ground and, if you're quiet, they come up to find out what it's doing there. When their eyes reflect the beam, you shoot."

"I don't suppose we'd run much risk, but a still-hunt is poaching and I doubt if it's worth the bother," Stannard replied carelessly.

"When you start poaching, you don't know where to stop. Not long since we shot two bighorn on a game reserve," said Deering with a laugh. "The strange thing is, although I quit ranching for the cities, I want to get back and play in the trees. Give me an axe and a gun and I'm a boy again. Say, let's try the still-hunt!"

The others agreed and after supper the party waited for dark. The green sky faded and the trees were very black. Then their saw-edged tops got indistinct and grey mist floated about the clearing in belts that sometimes melted and sometimes got thick. The resinous smell of the pines was keen and all was very quiet but for the turmoil of the river. An owl swooped by the house, shrieked mournfully, and vanished in the gloom.

At length Jimmy fixed his candle in a rude tin shield, felt that his rifle magazine was full, and waited for Bob to take the others to their posts. So long as they went away from him, all he saw was a faint glimmer, but sometimes one turned at an obstacle and a small bright flame shone in the mist. It looked as if the light floated without support

and Jimmy could picture its exciting the deer's curiosity. One could not use a pit-lamp in the tangled bush, but the clearing was some distance across and the deer came to feed on the tender undergrowth that had sprung up since the trees were chopped.

After a time Bob returned, but now Jimmy must go to his post he admitted he would sooner go to bed. He was tired and still-hunting with a light was forbidden; besides, they had not long since poached on a game reserve. Had not Deering bothered them, Jimmy thought Stannard would not have gone, but in the woods Deering's mood was a boy's. The packers and the horses were in a barn some distance back among the trees, and they had not got a light at the house. Somehow the quiet and gloom were daunting, but to hesitate was ridiculous and Jimmy went off with Bob.

In North America, trees are not cut off at the ground level and the clearing was dotted by tall stumps. Fern grew about the roots, and tangled vines and young willows occupied the open spaces. At a boggy patch the grass was high, and a ditch went up the middle and into the bush. The ditch was deep and Jimmy knew something about the labour it had cost. To see useful effort thrown away disturbed him and he speculated about the lonely rancher's stubborn fight. The man was gone; perhaps he knew himself beaten before he went, and the forest reclaimed the clearing.

They crossed the ditch and Bob stationed Jimmy behind a big stump at the edge of the trees. He said quietness was important, and if Jimmy left

his post and did not take his light, he might get shot. Moreover, he must not shoot unless he saw a deer's eyes shine; he must wait until he thought the animal near enough and then aim between the two bright spots. He might soon get a shot, but he might wait until daybreak and see nothing.

Then Bob went off and Jimmy was sorry he could not light his pipe. The night was cold and waiting behind the stump soon got dreary. Sometimes the mist was thick and sometimes it melted, but one could not see across the clearing and nothing indicated that the others were about. Jimmy did not know their posts; he imagined Bob had put them where they would not see each other's lights. He wondered whether the deer would soon arrive. If he did not see one before his candle burned out, he would lie down at the bottom of the stump and go to sleep.

XIV

A SHOT IN THE DARK

JIMMY imagined he did for a few minutes go to sleep, because he did not know when the noise began. Branches cracked as if a deer pushed through the brush a short distance off. Jimmy was not excited; in fact, he was cold and dull, and he used some effort to wake up.

The noise stopped and then began again. It now looked as if a large animal plunged across the clearing. Jimmy did not think a deer went through the brush like that, but for a moment he saw a luminous spot in the dark. Something reflected the beam from his candle and he threw the rifle to his shoulder.

His hand shook and he tried to steady the barrel. He felt a jerk and was dully conscious of the report. As a rule, when one concentrates on a moving target one does not hear the gun; the strange thing was Jimmy imagined he heard his a second before the trigger yielded.

The deer did not stop and he pumped in another cartridge. He heard nothing, but red sparks leaped from the rifle and then all was dark. A heavy object rolled in the young willows and some-

body shouted. Lights tossed and it looked as if people ran about.

Jimmy shouted to warn the others and left the stump. When he jumped across the ditch his candle went out, and on the other side his foot struck something soft. Stooping down, he felt about and then got up and gasped. His heart beat, for he knew the object he had touched was not a deer.

After a moment or two Stannard joined him and took a miner's lamp from his hat. Jimmy shivered, for the light touched a man who lay in the willows. His arms were thrown out, and as much of his face as Jimmy saw was very white. The other side was buried in the wet grass.

"Is he dead?" Jimmy gasped.

"Not yet, I think," said Stannard, and Deering, running up, pushed him back and got on his knees.

Using some effort, he lifted the man's head and partly turned him over. The others saw a few drops of blood about a very small hole in the breast of his deerskin jacket.

"A blamed awkward spot!" Deering remarked and gave Jimmy a sympathetic glance. "Your luck's surely bad, but get hold. We must carry him to the house."

Stannard got down; he was cooller than Jimmy, but they heard an angry shout, and Deering jumped for the lamp. When he ran forward the others saw a young police-trooper crawl from the ditch. Stopping on the bank, he looked down into the mud, and Bob, a few yards off, studied him with a

grim smile. Jimmy remarked that Okanagan had not a rifle.

"If you try to get your blasted gun, I'll sock my knife to you," said Bob. "Shove on in front and stop where the light is."

The trooper advanced awkwardly. His Stetson hat was gone and his head was cut. When he saw the man on the ground he stopped.

"You've killed him," he said. "Put up your hands! You're my prisoners!"

Bob laughed. "Cut it out! That talk may go at Regina; we've no use for it in the bush."

"An order from the Royal North-West goes everywhere. Quit fooling with that knife. My duty is——"

"Oh, shucks!" said Bob, and turned to the others. "The kid fell on his head and is rattled bad."

"He's hurt; give him a drink, Stannard," said Deering. "We must help the other fellow. Lift his feet; I'll watch out for his head. Get hold, Bob."

They carried the man to the house. When they put him down he did not move, but Jimmy thought he breathed. Deering pushed a folded coat under his neck and held Stannard's flask to his mouth. His lips were tight and the liquor ran down his skin.

"A bad job!" said Deering, who opened the man's jacket. "All the same, his heart has not stopped."

The packers from the barn were now pushing about the door and he beckoned one.

"Take the best horse and start for the hotel. Get the clerk to wire for a doctor and bring him along as quick as you can make it."

The packer went off and Deering asked the policeman: "Who's your pal?"

"He's Douglas, the game-warden. Looks as if you'd killed him."

"He's not dead yet," Deering rejoined, and pulled out some cigarettes. "He may die. I don't know, but we'll give him all the chances we can. In the meantime, take a smoke and tell us what you were doing at the clearing."

The trooper lighted a cigarette and leaned against the wall. Somebody had fixed two candles on the logs and the light touched the faces of the group. All were quiet but Deering, and Jimmy noted with surprise that Stannard let him take control. Stannard's look was very thoughtful; Bob's was keen and grim. The trooper had obviously got a nasty knock. At the door the packers were half seen in the gloom, but Jimmy felt the unconscious man on the boards, so to speak, dominated the picture. Although Jimmy himself was highly strung he was cool.

"My officer sent me help the warden round you up for poaching on the reserve," said the trooper. "When we hit the clearing we saw you were out with the pit-light and Douglas reckoned we'd get Okanagan first; the rest of you were tourists and wouldn't bother us. Douglas calculated Okanagan knew the best stand for a shot and would go right there. His plan was to steal up and get him. I was to watch out and butt in when I was wanted."

"It didn't go like that!" Bob remarked. "When you saw me by the ditch had I a gun?"

"So far as I could see you had not. You began to pull your knife."

Stannard motioned Bob to be quiet and the other resumed: "I heard Douglas shout and I got on a move. In the dark, I ran up against a stump, pitched over, and went into the ditch. I heard a shot——"

"You heard *one* shot?" said Deering.

"I don't know—I'd hit my head and was trying to find my rifle. Well, I guess that's all!"

"I shot twice," said Jimmy, in a quiet voice. "I don't think Bob used a gun. All the same, when I pulled the trigger I imagined I heard another report; but perhaps it was my rifle. I really don't know."

"The number of shots is important," Stannard observed.

Deering looked up sharply. "To find out is the police's job. Ours is not to help."

"We ought to help," Jimmy replied. "I thought a deer was coming; I had no object for shooting the warden, but if my bullet hit him, the police must not blame Bob." He turned to the others. "How many shots did you hear?"

Perhaps it was strange, but nobody knew. A packer thought he heard three shots, although he admitted he might have been cheated because the reports echoed in the woods. After a few moments they let it go and Deering glanced at the man on the floor.

"Maybe he knows. I doubt if he will tell!"

Then the trooper got up awkwardly. "Give me a light. I'm going across the clearing; I want to see your stands."

For the most part, the others went with him. Their curiosity was keen and it looked as if nobody reflected that the lad was their antagonist. In fact, since they carried in the warden, all antagonism had vanished. Jimmy, however, stopped. He was on the floor and did not want to get up. After the strain, he was bothered by a dull reaction and felt slack. By and by Stannard returned and sat down on the boards.

"Well?" said Jimmy. "Have you found out much?"

"The trooper found your two cartridges and the posts Bob gave us. You were at a big stump, Bob a short distance on your left, although he declares he had not a gun. My stand was on your other side. The warden's track across the brush was plain. He was going nearly straight for the stump and the bullet mark is at the middle of his chest."

"It looks as if I shot him," Jimmy said and shivered.

"Then you must brace up and think about the consequences!"

"Somehow I don't want to bother about this yet. Besides, it's plain I thought I aimed at a deer."

"I doubt," Stannard remarked, with some dryness. "For one thing, the police know we killed the big-horn on the reserve, and since we took Bob again, to state he cheated us would not help. The fellow's a notorious poacher, and when the

warden arrived he found us using the pit-light, which the game laws don't allow. On the whole, I think the police have grounds to claim Douglas was not shot by accident."

"But he may get better."

"It's possible; I think that's all. But suppose he does get better? Do you imagine his narrative would clear you?"

Jimmy pondered. Until Stannard began to argue, all he had thought about was that he had shot the warden, but now he weighed the consequences. He was young and freedom was good. Moreover, he had seen men, chained by the leg to a heavy iron ball, engaged making a road. A warden with a shot-gun superintended their labour, and Jimmy had thought the indignity horrible. He could not see himself grading roads, perhaps for all his life, with a gang like that.

"What must I do about it?" he asked.

"I'd put up some food and start for the rocks. Take a rifle and the Indian packer, and try to get down the east side of the range by the neck below the buttress. Then you might perhaps push across to the foothills and the plains. The police will, no doubt, reckon on your going west for the Pacific coast, and, if you tried, would stop you. As far as Revelstoke, the railroad follows the only break in the mountains, and orders will be telegraphed to watch the stations. No; I think you must steer for the Alberta plains."

Jimmy knitted his brows. If he could reach the coast, he might get into the United States or on board a ship, but he must cross British Columbia

and, for the most part, the province was a rugged, mountainous wilderness. The northern railroads were not yet built; the settlements were along the C.P.R. track and the lake steamboat routes. He durst not use the railroad; but when he thought about the rocks and broken mountains he must cross to reach the plains he shrank.

"I could not carry the food I'd need," he said.

"You have a rifle, and must take the packer. So long as deer and grouse are in the woods, an Indian will not starve," Stannard replied and gave Jimmy his wallet. "Offer the fellow a large sum and he'll see you out. But you must start!"

"Thank you; I'll risk it," said Jimmy, and giving Stannard his hand, went off.

Not long afterwards the others returned and Deering looked about the room.

"Where's Jimmy?" he asked.

"He went out a few minutes since," Stannard replied in a careless voice and Deering turned to the trooper.

"Somebody must watch Douglas, but you're knocked out and Mr. Stannard and I will undertake the job until sun-up. It's obvious our interest is to keep him alive."

The lad agreed. His head was cut and he had not found his rifle. To imagine he could control a party of athletic men was ridiculous, and since they were friendly he must be resigned.

Not long before daybreak Deering woke up and looked about. Bob's pit-lamp, hanging from a beam, gave a dim light.

"Hallo! Jimmy's not back!"

Stannard looked at the others and thought them asleep. Signing Deering to follow, he went to the door. He had pulled off his boots and Deering trod like a cat.

"Jimmy will not come back. He started for the plains, across the neck."

"You sent the kid across the hardest country in Alberta?"

"I don't know that I did send him; but we'll let it go. Jimmy's a mountaineer and he took the Indian."

"Shucks!" said Deering. "The Indian's a coast Siwash and not much use on the rocks. Jimmy's an English tenderfoot and has no *Chinook*. He can't talk to the Indian. I doubt if he's got a compass or a map."

"He has my map and I imagine an Indian does not need a compass," Stannard rejoined. "At all events, I didn't see another plan."

Deering looked at him hard. "Well, perhaps Jimmy's lucky because I was born and raised in the bush. Fix up a plausible tale for the policeman. When he wakes I'll be hitting Jimmy's trail."

He turned and his bulky figure melted in the dark. Stannard knew he was going to the barn to get food, and for a few moments knitted his brows. Then he shrugged philosophically and went back to the house.

XV

TROOPER SIMPSON'S PRISONERS

DAY broke drearily across the clearing. Mist rolled about the dark pines and when the wind got stronger the dark branches tossed. The loghouse was cold and trooper Simpson, turning over on the hard boards, shivered. Then he remarked that although the pit-lamp had gone out the room was not dark and he was dully conscious that he had slept longer than he ought. After a few moments, his glance rested on an object covered by blankets at the other end of the room and he got up with a jerk.

His head hurt and he was dizzy. He now remembered that he had run against a stump and fallen into the ditch; but he must brace up and with something of an effort he crossed the floor. So far as he could see, the warden's eyes were shut and his face was pinched. All the same, Simpson thought he breathed and when he touched him his skin was not cold.

"Hallo!" he said and Stannard, sitting by Douglas, turned.

"He's very sick," Simpson resumed. "What are we going to do about it?"

"We must try to keep him warm and when he can swallow give him a little weak liquor and perhaps some hot soup. I expect that's all, but I have sent for a doctor."

"I see you have given him good blankets," said Simpson, who looked about. "Leyland's not back; you allowed he had gone out for a few minutes. Then where's the big man?"

"I stated Leyland went out a few minutes before you inquired for him," Stannard said drily. "Some time after Leyland went, Deering started for the bush."

"Then, I've got stung! You knew I'd lost my rifle and you helped my prisoners get off!"

Stannard smiled. "To talk about your prisoners is ridiculous; I imagine we are rather your hosts. I am not a policeman, and when my friends resolved to leave the camp I had no grounds to meddle. However, if it will give you some satisfaction, I'll lend you a rifle."

"I'm going to get mine," said Simpson and started across the clearing.

He came back before long, carrying a wet rifle. His clothes were muddy and his mouth was tight.

"I found her in two or three minutes, but when I was in the ditch last night I felt all about."

"To find an object in the dark is awkward," Stannard remarked.

Simpson gave him an angry glance. "The magazine's broke and the ejector's jambed. I don't see how she got broke. I didn't hit the stump with my gun; I hit it with my head."

"The thing is rather obvious. The cut ought to satisfy your officer," said Stannard soothingly.

"If you hadn't let your partners go, I wouldn't have had to satisfy my officer. Now I sure don't know what I'm going to do about it."

"The situation is embarrassing," Stannard agreed. "My friends have been gone some time and are pretty good mountaineers; it's possible they could go where you could not. Then, if you went after Deering and Leyland, I might go off another way. I don't want to persuade you, but perhaps you ought to stop and take care of Douglas."

Simpson frowned and put down his damaged rifle.

"Looks as if you had got me beat and I've no use for talking. Now the light's good, I'll take a proper look at your party's tracks."

Stannard let him go and soon afterwards Bob came in. Sitting down on the boards, he struck a pungent sulphur match and lighted his pipe. Stannard's glance got hard. He knew the Western hired man's independence, but he thought Bob truculent.

"The warden's very ill and your tobacco's rank," he said.

"He's sick all right. I doubt if he'll get better," Bob agreed in a meaning voice, although he did not put away his pipe.

For a few moments Stannard pondered. To baffle the young trooper had rather amused him, but to dispute with Bob was another thing.

"If Douglas does not get better, it will be awkward," Stannard said.

"It will sure be awkward for Mr. Leyland."

"Or for you!"

"Shucks! You know I was sort of superintending and hadn't a gun."

"I don't know," said Stannard. "You stated you had not a gun. In the meantime, I imagine Simpson is measuring distances and fixing angles, or something like that. I can't judge if he knows his job; perhaps you can."

Bob's glance was a little keener. "Huh!" he said scornfully, "the kid's from the cities and can't read tracks. All the same, somebody shot Douglas, and if the police can't fix it on Leyland, they'll get after me."

"I don't see where I can help. For one thing, Mr. Leyland is my friend. Then all I can state is, I didn't see you carry a gun. On the whole, I don't think the police have much grounds to bother you."

"Well, I don't take no chances; the police would sooner I was for it. They can't claim Leyland meant to kill the warden, but they might claim I did. Gimme a hundred dollars and I'll quit."

Stannard smiled. "I have not got ten dollars; I gave Jimmy my wallet. He's your employer."

"Then, if I run up against Mr. Leyland, I'll know he carries a wad and I guess I can persuade him to see me out," said Bob. "Now I'm going to take all the grub I want. So long!"

He went off and Stannard shrugged; but a few moments afterwards he rested his back against the wall and shut his eyes, as if he were tired. By

and by Simpson returned and met Bob near the door. Bob carried a big pack, a cartridge belt, and a rifle.

"Hallo!" said Simpson. "Another for the woods? Well, you got to drop that pack. You're not going."

"You make me tired. *My* gun's not broke," Bob rejoined and shoved the muzzle against Simpson's chest. "Get inside, sonny. Get in quick!"

The Royal North-West Police do not enlist slack-nerved men and Simpson's pluck was good. For all that, he was lightly built and hurt, while Bob was big and muscular. When Simpson seized the rifle barrel Bob pushed hard on the butt. The trooper staggered back, struck the door-post, and plunged into the house. Bob laughed.

"Your job's to help cure your partner. Maybe he knows who shot him," he remarked and started across the clearing.

Simpson leaned against the wall and gasped. When he got his breath he turned to Stannard savagely. "Where's your rifle?"

"In the corner behind you," Stannard replied, and Simpson, seizing the rifle, jerked open the breech.

"My cartridge shells won't fit."

"It's possible," said Stannard. "I didn't engage to lend you ammunition, but if you go to the barn, you'll find a brown valise. Bring me the valise and I may find you a box of cartridges."

"Do you reckon Bob is going to wait until I get all fixed?"

"That's another thing," said Stannard pleasantly.

Simpson put down the rifle. "In about a minute the fellow'll hit the timber and his sort don't leave much trail. Then you have not pulled out yet."

"You imagine if you went after Bob and did not find him, you might not find me when you came back?"

"That's so," Simpson agreed. "Not long since I reckoned I'd got the gang. Now you're all that's left. The packers don't count."

"Oh, well," said Stannard, smiling, "I'll engage to stop. I expect to pay a fine for poaching, although I didn't know I was on the reserve. Since I'm resigned, it doesn't look as if my friends had an object for shooting Douglas. You see, I killed the big-horn."

"All the same, three have lit out."

"There's the puzzle; the warden was hit by one bullet. I own I don't see much light; but I think you sketched the clearing."

Simpson pulled out a note-book and Stannard remarked that the plan of the ground was carefully drawn. He thought the spots the sportsmen had occupied were accurately marked; distances and the lines of the warden's and Simpson's advance were indicated.

"The thing's like a map," he said. "How did you fix the positions?"

"I carry a compass and can step off a measurement nearly right. At Regina they teach us to study tracks, but I was at a surveyor's office before I joined up."

"Then, you were a surveyor?" said Stannard

with keen interest, for he saw the accuracy of the plan was important.

Simpson smiled. "Surveying's a close profession. I was a clerk, but I copied plans and sometimes the boss took me out to help pull the measuring chain. Well, I guess that plan will stand!"

When Stannard gave back the book his look was thoughtful, but he said, "Until the doctor arrives, we must concentrate on keeping Douglas alive. To begin with, we'll get the packers to make a branch bed and light a fire."

Douglas lived, but, so far as the others could see, this was all. He hardly moved and he did not talk, but sometimes at night his skin got hot and he raved in a faint broken voice. A packer shot some willow grouse and they made broth, and Stannard put away the party's small stock of liquor and canned delicacies for his use. Sometimes he swallowed a little food, but for the most part he lay like a log in blank unconsciousness.

Simpson, Stannard, and a packer watched, and before long Stannard knew the trooper was his man. He had qualities that attracted trustful youth and used his talent cleverly. For all that, when the doctor and an officer of the mounted police arrived, Stannard's look was worn and Simpson's relief was keen. The officer sent Stannard from the room, but ordered him to wait at the barn.

After some time Simpson came to the barn and Stannard, returning to the house, saw the officer's brows were knit. The doctor put some instruments into a case and then turned his head and looked at his companion. Stannard imagined they had not

heard his step and for the moment had forgotten about him.

"He was obviously hit in front. The bullet mark's near the middle of his body and indicates he was going for the man who shot him," the officer remarked.

"The wound at the back does not altogether support your argument," the doctor replied. "It is not at the middle, and the fellow is lucky because it is not. The mark's, so to speak, obliquely behind the other."

"The mark where a bullet leaves the body is generally larger?"

"To reckon on its being larger is a pretty safe rule," the doctor agreed.

Stannard's interest was keen, but the officer saw him and looked at the doctor, who signed Stannard to advance.

"I imagine you have used some thought for the sick man," he said. "Sit down; I want to know——"

In a few minutes Stannard satisfied his curiosity, and the officer then took him to another room. He used reserve, but he was polite, and Stannard thought he had examined Simpson and the trooper's narrative had carried some weight.

"The doctor states Douglas must not be moved," the officer presently remarked. "In the morning, I must start for the railroad and you will go with me. I'll try to make things as easy as I can, but if you tried to get away, you would run some risk. The Royal North-West have powers the Government does not give municipal police."

"Had I wanted to get away, I would have gone some time since," Stannard replied.

The other nodded. "Simpson admits your help was worth much. Well, you will certainly be made accountable for poaching, but this may satisfy my chiefs—I don't know yet. I expect there's no use in my trying to get some light about your friends' plans?"

"There is not much use," Stannard agreed. "For one thing, my friends did not altogether enlighten me."

"Very well," said the officer, smiling. "So long as you do not go off the ranch, you can go where you like. After breakfast in the morning we start for the railroad."

XVI

THE NECK

MIST floated about the rocks and the evening was dark. To push on was rash, but Jimmy hoped he might get down to the trees below the snow-line. Anyhow, he must if possible get off the broken crest of the range. Since noon until the sun went west and shadow crept across the mountain, he and the Indian had crouched behind a shelf and watched snow and stones plunge to the valley. Now all was quiet and the snow was firm, but the mist was puzzling and Jimmy could not see where he went. All he knew was, he followed the neck to lower ground.

Jimmy was tired. In the wilds, if one can shoot straight, fresh meat may sometimes be got, but one must carry a rifle, flour, and groceries. Moreover, he now felt the reaction after the strain, and the journey on which he had started daunted him. He must push across a wilderness of high rocks and snow. In the mountains one cannot travel fast, and when he reached the plains the distance to the American frontier was long. He durst not stop at the settlements and, until he crossed the boundary, must camp in the grass,

although the days got short and the nights were cold.

The Indian, heavily loaded, went a few yards in front, but he came from the warm coast and his part was to supply them with game and fish. Jimmy got some comfort from reflecting that he himself knew the Swiss rocks, because he rather thought all mountains whose tops were above the snow-line, so to speak, approximated to a type.

Frost split their ragged pinnacles and great blocks plunged down. Avalanches ground their shoulders to precipitous slopes, from which battered crags stuck out. As a rule, the top of the long ridges was narrow, like a rough saw-edge, but sometimes a bulging snow-cornice followed the crest. Where the snow-fields dropped to a hollow, a glacier generally went down in flowing curves. One could follow a glacier, but at some places the surface wrinkled and broke in tremendous cracks.

By and by the Indian stopped and Jimmy joining him looked about. The neck had got very steep and the mist was thick. The pitch at the top of a glacier is awkward and Jimmy knitted his brows. If he balanced properly, pushed off, and trailed his rifle butt, he would go down like a toboggan ; the trouble was, he might go over a perpendicular fall and into the *bergschrund* crack. To climb down and slip meant a furious plunge like the other, and if there was not a bergschrund, he might hit a rock. Yet, if he meant to go east, he must get down, and for a few minutes he sat moodily in the snow.

The strange thing was, Stannard had told him

to try the neck. Stannard knew much about rocks and glaciers, but perhaps he had not explored far. Then, to some extent, Jimmy had started because Stannard urged him. Now he thought about it, to run away was to admit his guilt. Stannard ought to have seen this, but obviously had not. All, however, had got a nasty jolt, and when one was jolted one was not logical. In the meantime, he must concentrate on getting down.

By and by he heard a shout and steps. Flat lumps of snow like plates rolled down and Jimmy thrilled. Somebody was coming and he thought he knew Deering's voice. Then an indistinct object pierced the mist, slid for some distance and stopped.

"Hallo, Jimmy! You haven't got far ahead," Deering shouted, and his strong voice echoed in the rocks.

Jimmy was moved and comforted. Deering looked very big and his heartiness was bracing.

"I was forced to stop at the buttress in the afternoon."

"Sure," said Deering. "I reckoned on your getting held up. I was on the ridge and shoved right along, but I'm going to stop for a few minutes now. Get off the snow; we'll sit on my pack."

"What about the warden?" Jimmy asked.

"When I started he wasn't conscious. Shock collapse, I guess, but you could hear his breath and a little colour was coming to his skin. On the whole, I think if they get a doctor quick he'll pull Douglas through. The trouble is, we won't know ——But we'll talk about this again. The ground ahead is blamed steep. Looks as if we might hit

an awkward *schrund* at the top of the glacier. Anyhow, we'll wait a bit. I think the moon's coming out."

Jimmy agreed. He knew that where a snow-field comes down nearly perpendicularly to a glacier one generally finds a tremendous crack. By and by the mist rolled off and a small dim moon came out. Deering got up and when he strapped on his pack they started down the slope. They used caution and after a time Deering stopped.

The mist was thinner and one could see for a short distance. Black and white rock bordered the narrowing neck, and in front the snow fell away, plunging down rather like a frozen wave. Shreds of mist floated up from the cloud that filled the valley, and Jimmy, looking down on the vapour's level top, got a sense of profound depth. All the same, the mist did not interest him much. Fifty yards off, an uneven dark streak marked the bottom of the snowy wave. The streak was broad; it's opposite edge sparkled in the moon and then melted into shadow that got deeper until it was black. Jimmy studied the yawning gap and shivered. Had Deering not arrived and the moon shone out, he thought he would have gone across the edge.

"I've no use for fooling around a *schrund* in the mist and we can't wait for daybreak," Deering remarked. "We must get back and make the timber line on the other side before we freeze."

Jimmy doubted if he could get back and shrank from the effort. He thought the buttress five or six hundred feet above him, and for a fresh, athletic man to get up in an hour was good climbing. But

he was not fresh ; his body was exhausted and he had borne a heavy nervous strain. All the same, to wait in the snow for daybreak was unthinkable.

They fronted the long climb and Jimmy, breathing hard and sometimes stumbling, made slow progress. He doubted if he could have got up the steepest pitch had not Deering helped him, and at another the Indian took his pack. They reached the top, and Deering studied the white slope that went down the other side. The moon had gone and thick cloud rolled about the heights.

" This lot peters out in a gravel bank near the snow-line. I guess we'll slide it," he said and vanished in the mist.

Jimmy braced his legs, pushed off and let himself go. In Switzerland he had studied the *glissade*, but when one carries a heavy load to balance on a precipitous slope is difficult. It looked as if Deering could not balance, because after a few moments Jimmy shot past an object that rolled in the snow. Then he himself lost control, his pack pulled him over, and he went head-foremost down hill. When he stopped the pitch was easier, and looking back he saw a belt of cloud three or four hundred feet above. He had gone through the cloud and when he turned his head he saw dark forest roll up from the valley in front. For all that, the highest trees were some distance off.

By and by the Indian and Deering arrived and soon afterwards the snow got thin. Stones covered the mountain-side and now and then a bank their feet disturbed slipped away and carried them down. At length, Deering, smashing through some juniper

scrub, seized a small dead pine, and when Jimmy, breathless and rather battered, arrived, declared they had gone far enough. They had got fuel and water ran in the stones.

Half an hour afterwards, Jimmy sat down on thin branches in a hollow behind a rock. In front a fire snapped and the rock kept off the wind. The smell of coffee floated about the camp and the Indian was occupied with a frying-pan.

When Jimmy had satisfied his appetite he lighted his pipe. He was warm and the daunting sense of loneliness had gone. By and by Deering began to talk.

"When Stannard stated you had pulled out for the foothills I thought I'd better come along. He talked about your shoving across for the boundary, but I doubted if you could make it. Perhaps an Alpine Club party, starting from a base camp, with packers to relay supplies, could cross the rocks, but when your outfit's a little flour and a slab of pork it sure can't be done. My notion is, we'll get back from the railroad, pitch camp in a snug valley and hunt."

"But you have no grounds to hide from the police."

"I'm pretty keen on hunting and I like it in the mountains," Deering replied with a laugh. "To start with horses and packers is expensive, but our hunting won't cost much. Then I'd a sort of notion I ought to see you out. We'll let it go at that. For a time the police will watch the railroad, but they'll get tired."

"You're a very good sort," Jimmy declared

and resumed : " The Royal North-West boast they have not let a man they really wanted get away."

" Police talk ! " said Deering. " Reckon it up. They put two troopers to watch a hundred miles of wilderness. In broken, timbered country a horse can't go and a man can hardly shove along. I allow the boys are smart, but they can't do more than's possible for flesh and blood. When we've put them off our track we'll fix up a scheme."

" Now I think about it, I don't know that I ought to have run away. Stannard rather persuaded me to start."

" Perhaps he was justified. The forestry department bosses can't allow their wardens to be shot. Then you belong to a gang that had killed bighorn on a reserve and engaged a notorious poacher for guide. When Douglas was shot he was getting after your man. On the whole, I reckon I'd have pulled out. But I don't see why Stannard suggested your going for the plains. He ought to know you couldn't make it."

" He didn't know," Jimmy declared.

" Very well ! I reckon he knew you could not get down the neck. Anyhow, he knew the ground ; he was up on the range."

Jimmy was vaguely disturbed. Deering's remarks indicated that he was not satisfied and he thought the fellow studied him.

" Stannard reached the neck, but it's obvious he did not go far enough to see the ice-fall."

" I didn't see the ice-fall, but I expected to get up against something of the sort. Stannard's a famous climber."

"After all, we might have got down."

"It's possible," Deering agreed with some dryness. "If we'd had two good fresh men, a proper rope and ice-picks, I might have tried, after sun-up. But we hadn't got the proper truck, and I own I wasn't fresh."

"I was exhausted," said Jimmy. "Still an exploit we thought daunting might not daunt Stannard. I expect that accounts for it."

Deering gave him a keen glance and smiled. "Oh, well; he's sure a good man on the rocks."

Jimmy knocked out his pipe. So long as he had persuaded Deering that Stannard had not carelessly allowed him to run a risk he was content. He did not want to dispute about it. He liked Deering and to see him across the fire was some comfort. Deering had not Stannard's qualities, but Jimmy began to see he himself was rather Deering's sort than the other's. Then in the mountains cultivation had not the importance it had, for example, at an English country house. Jimmy liked Deering's raw human force, his big muscular body, and his rather noisy laugh. Anyhow, Deering had joined him and meant to see him out. He put away his pipe, pulled up his thick blue blanket and went to sleep.

XVII

DILLON MEDITATES

WHEN Stannard reached the settlements he was again examined by the police. He knew where frankness paid and was frank, but he owed something to trooper Simpson's narrative and something to his personal charm. A magistrate ordered him to pay a rather heavy fine and give up the big-horn heads, and then let him go, but Stannard doubted if the police were altogether satisfied. The officer who examined him was remarkably keen.

On the evening Stannard returned to the hotel, Laura and Dillon occupied chairs at the table on the terrace. Electric lights burned on the veranda, for the days got short, but the sunset was not altogether gone. Dillon saw Laura's face in profile against the fading reflections. She looked away from him to the north, where pines and rocks and snow were all deep, soft blue. Her arm was on the table, her body was partly turned, and Dillon thought her strangely beautiful. All the same, he wanted her to look round.

"You are quiet," he remarked.

"I'm thinking about Jimmy in the wilds. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," Dillon declared. "When Jimmy was around the hotel, I had no use for the fellow; now he's in the mountains, I'm bothered about him. Somehow one likes Jimmy, and if I knew how I could help, I'd start."

Laura turned her head and gave him a curious glance.

"Why do you like Jimmy? He's English and you're frankly American."

"That is so. To begin with, I've no pick on Jimmy because he loved you; if he had not loved you, I'd have known his blood wasn't red. Then, although he's English, in a sense he's our type. He's sincere; we are sincere, you know, and perhaps, from your point of view, we don't use much reserve. You can move us and when we're moved we talk and get busy. Well, Jimmy's like that; he's marked by something generously human, but I doubt if he got it at London clubs. Maybe it's his inheritance from the folks who built the cotton mill."

Laura said nothing. She doubted if Frank's willingness to state his grounds for liking Jimmy altogether accounted for his rather unusual effort. Indeed, she imagined he laboured to get a light on a subject that puzzled him.

"Well," he resumed, "to know Deering went after Jimmy is some comfort. If Jimmy gets up against it in the rocks, Deering will see him through."

"Your trust in Deering is remarkable!"

"He's a white man," said Dillon with a smile. "To be his friend cost me high, but now I've cut out bets and cards, I'd sooner he'd got my dollars

than another. You see, I got something back. The fellow's big."

Laura was annoyed. She wanted to feel Deering was her antagonist and had exploited Frank's trust. The trouble was, she could not altogether do so, but she durst not admit that Stannard shared his guilt and perhaps his reward. To chastise Deering, so to speak, exculpated her father.

"He is certainly muscular, and rather gross," she remarked.

"He's flesh and blood. I doubt if you quite get us yet. In the West, we haven't cultivated out rude emotions; we like a fellow who plunges at an obstacle, sweats and laughs, and sometimes gets mad. We're up against savage Nature and our job is man's first job, to satisfy human needs. Well, you know my father; he's a pretty good Western type. When he started in, his food was frugal and his clothes were overalls. Now he's moving forests, and architects come to study the office block he built; but if things go wrong in the woods, his superintendents know he can use their talk and handle a cant-pole. His power springs from the primitive streak."

"We'll let it go," said Laura and indicated the long rows of pines melting into the gloom. "Dark now comes soon."

"Before long the frost will come and in the mountains the cold is pretty fierce. On Puget Sound the soft Chinook blows and the white Olympians stand between you and the winds from the Rockies. The old man's keen for me to bring you back. What about our starting?"

Laura blushed, for she had engaged to marry Dillon soon, but she said, "My father cannot go yet. So long as Jimmy is in the mountains and the warden cannot tell his story, I think he will stop in Canada. Perhaps he ought to stop."

"Oh, well; you can reckon on Mr. Stannard's taking the proper line," Dillon agreed rather moodily. "You feel the thing's mechanical. Mr. Stannard is like that."

"Mechanical?" said Laura, lifting her brows.

"His taking the proper line's mechanical. He doesn't bother about it. In the West, his correctness is somehow exotic."

"If my father is exotic, I expect I am exotic."

"Sure! You are like a bird of paradise or a flower from the tropics. We are a rude lot of hustlers and your grace and beauty carry us away."

"You're romantic, but sometimes you're rather nice," Laura remarked with a smile. "All the same, if my father resolves to stop in Canada, it is not a mechanical resolve but because he feels he ought."

"I expect that is so," Dillon agreed and lighted a cigarette.

He thought Stannard ought to stop, and since he meant to do so, to doubt him was not logical; yet Dillon did doubt. For one thing, the fellow was Jimmy's friend, but when Jimmy started for the rocks Deering, not the other, went after him. Then Stannard's narrative was puzzling. Jimmy had run away and his going indicated that he was accountable for the warden's getting shot. If Jimmy imagined he had shot at a deer, he ought to have

stopped. Moreover, Bob had run away, and if he had hit the warden, it was obvious that Jimmy had not. Stannard's tale was not plausible, and since Stannard was clever Dillon imagined he had not told all he knew.

But Dillon began to see his vague antagonism had another foundation. He was frankly Western and Stannard's type was new, although some people in down-East cities cultivated his qualities. On the Pacific slope, men were highly-strung, optimistic, and rather boyishly keen. They plunged into big risky undertakings, sweated, and fought. In fact, where Nature was not yet conquered, their part was protagonist. Dillon owned that he himself was loafing, but he had not loafed long and would soon return to his proper occupation.

Stannard had not an occupation and Dillon thought the grounds for his distrust were there. Moreover, he had not a bank-roll, although he lived extravagantly and indulged his fastidiousness. His habit was to strike exactly the proper note, but sometimes its monotonous accuracy jarred. Fastidious cultivation was for women. Yet Stannard was not at all womanly; Dillon began to sense in him a hard, calculating vein. For all that, he must not exaggerate, and Laura was not like her father.

"You could of course join my folk, although Mr. Stannard would sooner wait," he said.

"I think not. My father planned the excursion to the mountains and led the party. Until people are satisfied about the shooting accident, I must not go to your house."

"Now you are ridiculous!" Dillon declared.

"All the same, I will not go," said Laura firmly.

"Then, I'm going to stop with you. I'd like to stop, but if Jimmy wants me, I'm his man."

"I don't expect Jimmy will need you. Father imagines he's a long way off and will soon reach the plains," said Laura and began to talk about something else.

Jimmy was not steering for the plains; he had, in fact, known for some time that he could not get there. The morning after Deering joined him was calm and cold. The sun touched the high rocks and in places a pine branch sparkled with dew, but a thousand feet below the camp the mist was like a level floor. One could not see the valley, and the turmoil of a river came up with a faint hoarse throb as if from a long way off. Jimmy's fatigue and gloom were gone; he felt fresh and to see Deering fry pork was comforting. He got a rather frugal breakfast and lighted his pipe.

"What are our plans for to-day?" he asked.

"We must try to get a deer. Fresh venison's most as tough as raw hide, but, if you put the roasted meat in a bag with salt, after a week or two you can eat the stuff. How many cartridge have you got?"

"Six," said Jimmy and Deering smiled.

"You started for the plains with six shells! Well, I've got a box of twenty-five, but somebody has taken out ten or twelve. Looks as if we want to shoot straight. The pork won't hold up long."

"Where do we go when we have got a deer?"

"I reckon we'll go north," said Deering thought-

fully. "They talk about new railroads, but so far the only line of communication between the Rockies and the sea is the C.P.R. track. The settlements follow the line, and when you pull out of the narrow belt you're in the wilderness. The police will, no doubt, reckon on your trying to make Vancouver. We'll stop in the wilds and let them watch the railroad until they get tired."

"But if they find I haven't gone to Vancouver, won't they try the bush?"

"Look at Stannard's map," said Deering, with a smile. "Note the row of ranges and valleys running north and south. But the big ridges and furrows are not even; they're broken by high bench country and cut up by cross-spurs. Pretty awkward ground to search for two fellows' tracks! Our trouble's not to hide, but to get supplies. All the food they use in British Columbia comes in by the C.P.R."

Jimmy studied the map and agreed. Moreover, he was young and the wilds called. To plunge into the great desolation was something of an adventure and Deering claimed to know the bush.

"What about your hired man? Did you trust the fellow?" Deering resumed.

"I had no grounds to doubt him," Jimmy replied in a thoughtful voice. "Bob was rather inscrutable and didn't attract me, but he could chop and this was all I wanted."

"So far as you can calculate, he hadn't a pick on you?"

"Not at all. I think he was satisfied with his pay, and since I generally let him plan the work we

did not dispute. All the same, sometimes I imagined he gave me a queer moody look."

"Do you think he was, in any sense, Stannard's man?"

"Certainly not," said Jimmy, with some surprise. "Anyhow, I don't see——"

"I don't see," Deering admitted. "I'm looking for a light, but don't get much yet. Well, when you have smoked your pipe we'll hit the trail."

They got off a few minutes afterwards, and at noon reached the bottom of the hill. A high spur blocked the valley behind them, and the echoes of small avalanches rolled across the rocks. Deering declared the sliding snow would cover their tracks at the neck, but their line was to some extent obvious, and until they could break it, they must push on as fast as possible.

To push on fast was hard. Fallen trees and tangled brush blocked the gaps in the rows of trunks, but by and by Jimmy, looking through an opening, saw the woods shine with reflected light. The trees were like silver trees; they sparkled as if touched by frost, and for a few moments Jimmy was puzzled. Then he said, "Rampikes?"

Deering nodded. "A big burn! I expect it has cleared some ground for us."

A short distance farther on, the brushwood vanished. Underfoot was a soft carpet of ashes from which the trunks rose like columns. Their branches were gone and the smooth, round logs reflected the light. For a time to get free from entangling vines and thorns was a relief, but the ash was soft and when one disturbed it went up in

clouds. The black dust stuck to Jimmy's hot skin and he laboured across the clogging stuff. Then the desolation began to react on him. The birds were gone and the feathery ash was not broken by the tracks of animals. It was obvious they would not find a deer. All was dead, and but for the noise of falling water the silence was daunting. At length Jimmy stopped and leaned against a trunk.

"Come off!" said Deering. "Sit down, if you like, although I'd sooner keep on my feet. You don't want to lean against a rampike."

Jimmy was tired and sat in the ashes.

"How do the fires start?" he asked.

"It's puzzling. The forestry people claim they're not spontaneous," Deering replied. "Around the settlements, a fire sometimes starts from a burned slashing and the police get after the homesteader. All the same, you hit *brûlés* in country the Indians and prospectors leave alone. Anyhow, I guess we're lucky because there's not much wind, and while our luck is good we'll push along."

They set off and some time afterwards the roar of an avalanche broke the brooding calm. The noise swelled and rolled about the valley, as if great rocks were coming down, and then Jimmy heard a near, sharp crash. He jumped mechanically, and looking back, saw a pillar of dust float up like smoke from a blasting shot. In the dust, a big rampike slanted, broke, and plunged. Another went and Deering pushed Jimmy.

"We'll pull out," he shouted and they began to run.

When Jimmy stopped to get his breath the echoes had died away and all was quiet, but he felt he had had enough of the burned forest. After studying the rocks and gravel on the hillside he turned to Deering.

"You talked about breaking our line, and I expect we could get over the spur in front," he said. "Let's try."

XVIII

THE CARTRIDGE BELT

JIMMY's clothes were torn and he was bothered about his boots. He rather thought clothes and boots that would long bear the strain of a journey across the rocks were not made. At all events, one could not buy them at a Canadian settlement store. Then the things were wet and the morning was cold.

For all that, he must not grumble. The deer did not like the heavy dew and their habit was to come out on the rocks and get the sun. The Indian thought he had found a spot they haunted, and after breakfast led the others across a small tableland. By and by he stopped and Jimmy got down in the fern. In front, the timber was thin and a short distance off was a smooth rock. Jimmy saw the rock and the trees on the other side, but for a few moments this was all. A deer's soft colour harmonizes with stones and trunks, and, when its outline is broken, to distinguish the animal is hard.

The Indian frowned and signed, and Jimmy imagined the small patch of light colour cutting a pine trunk was a head. For one thing, it moved,

and the crooked line below it looked like a leg. Jimmy did not see the deer's back, but the top of the leg indicated where its shoulder was, and he rested his rifle on a branch. He got the sights where he wanted, braced his muscles, held his breath, and steadily pulled the trigger.

The deer jumped and a thin streak of smoke floated in front of Jimmy's eyes. The animal was not on the rock, but after a moment or two he saw it rise from a thicket and go over some tangled branches a man's height from the ground. Yet he thought the leap awkward and the deer came down in the fern before it ought. His heart beat and he waited for another shot, until he saw Deering a few yards off and remembered that their cartridges were not numerous. Deering's body was firmly poised, his head was bent forward and he balanced his rifle, half-way to his shoulder, as if it were a gun. Jimmy knew he could use it like a gun.

When the deer broke from the fern at the edge of the tableland Jimmy did not shoot. The animal's leap carried it across a clump of tall raspberries, but it would vanish in a moment and the brush in front was thick. Deering's rifle jerked, and the graceful body, carried by its speed, plunged into the brush. Jimmy heard a crash and the deer was gone. He thought it had gone over a rock and putting down his rifle he ran.

A minute or two afterwards he stopped at the top of a precipitous slope. A stream, however, cut the mountain-side and in places small trees were rooted in the stones. A hundred feet below, the deer lay on a shelf by a waterfall.

" I think I can reach it," said Jimmy, and dropped from the edge.

They needed the venison, but when he had got down a short distance he knew he was rash, for it looked as if the rocks on the other side of the waterfall were perpendicular. Then, although he might perhaps reach the shelf, to carry the deer back was another thing.

Using the small trees for support, he got to a slab above the shelf. The slab was wet and dotted by greasy moss, but a few cracks and small stones broke its surface and Jimmy trusted his luck. When he came down the ground shook and he saw the shelf was not, as he had imagined, a solid block but two or three large stones embedded in boggy soil. At one end the cascade had scooped out a small basin and the deer's hind quarters were in the pool. Jimmy seized its fore legs, and bracing his feet against a stone, began to pull. He pulled hard, but although he felt he moved, the deer did not. Then his foot went down, and letting go the animal, he threw himself back.

The deer rolled over and vanished. Water splashed, and Jimmy saw the stones plunge down the face of the cliff. For a moment or two he was rather angry than alarmed. They wanted the meat but the deer was gone. Then he saw he ran some risk of going down the cliff and he began to study the ground. Scratches on the stone indicated how he had reached the spot, but he had let himself go because the shelf was in front. The pitch was very steep and the rock was mossy. Not far off a small tree grew in a crack, but he could

not reach the trunk and rather thought to try would send him over the precipice.

He heard a shout and nailed boots rattled. Deering was coming down, although he was not yet in Jimmy's line of view. After a time, Jimmy, lying against the rock, turned his head and saw Deering had got hold of the tree.

"I'm anchored," said Deering. "Can you reach my hand?"

The effort was risky, but Jimmy tried and Deering seized his wrist. Deering pulled him up for a foot or two, and then stopped and gasped.

"Jamb yourself against the slab; I've got to let go."

Jimmy's boots slipped on the smooth stone and his hands were wet; he could not get a proper hold and the moss was slimy under his knees. Spreading out his arms, he let himself go slack and trusted his limp body would not slip back. He could not now see Deering and did not know what he did. After a moment or two he felt him seize his cartridge belt.

"Use your knees. When I lift grab the tree."

The cartridge belt got tight and Jimmy, using its support, reached the trunk. His jacket felt slack, as if something were gone, but this was not important and he heard Deering's laboured breath.

"Thanks!" he said, rather dully. "We have lost the deer."

"We have used two shells," said Deering. "Let's get up."

They got up, and at the top Jimmy put his hand to his waist.

"Hallo! Where's my belt?"

"Now I think about it, when I held you up I felt something give. I guess the buckle was pulling out. Well, we ought to see the brown leather."

They did not see it and Jimmy said, "All the cartridges I had are gone. How many have you got?"

"Twelve," said Deering, rather grimly. "Anyhow, I'm not going down again."

Jimmy nodded. He thought the belt had gone over the cliff.

"I brought about six pounds of pork from the camp."

"My load's flour, desiccated fruit, and a few cans of meat. Looks as if we had got to eat salmon."

"In the Old Country, one doesn't grumble about eating salmon," Jimmy remarked.

"Oh, well," said Deering, "I was raised in the bush and am not fastidious, but if we can't get salmon, I'll be resigned, The trouble is, since food's short we can't push back too far from the settlements. Well, we must try to hit a creek."

In the evening they came down to a small river and pitched camp on the bank. The Indian cut and trimmed a straight fir branch, but left a fork at the thinner end. Then he pulled out two cleverly-carved bone barbs, which he fitted on the forks and fastened by sinews to the staff.

"You could carry the business part of his outfit in your pocket," Deering remarked. "I expect his folks have used barbs like that for a thousand years. An Indian's tools are standardized, but when he thinks them good enough he stops. All

the same, I reckon he gets most as far as a man can get alone. He's an artist, but we beat him by co-operating to make machines. Anyhow, the fellow doesn't want you. Take a smoke and let him spear a fish."

Jimmy lighted his pipe and looked about. A few yards off, the current splashed against the stones. The water was green, and the line of driftwood and dead leaves on the bank indicated that the frost was stopping the muddy streams from the glaciers. Some distance down the river, the Indian balanced on a rock in a pool at the tail of a rapid. For a time he did not move and Jimmy thought his quietness statuesque. The fellow was like the herons he had studied with his glasses by a pool on the Scottish border. Then his body bent and the spear went down. The thrust and recovery were strangely quick, and Jimmy rather doubted if the man had moved.

"It looks as if he missed his stroke," he said.

"He's using a fir branch. An Indian spear is beautifully modelled," Deering replied.

A few minutes afterwards, the Indian bent backwards and a shining object struck the bank. Coming to the fire, he put down the fish and Jimmy's appetite was blunted. The salmon was lean and battered. Its colour was dull and its tail was broken. Rows of scales were rubbed off; the fins were worn from the supporting ribs.

"I'm not as hungry as I was. Are all like that?" he said.

"It depends on when you get them," Deering replied. "A June steelhead, fresh from the sea,

is pretty good, but a salmon that has pushed through to head waters in the fall is another thing. When you think about it, the salmons' journey inland is remarkable. They bore against the autumn floods when the melted snow comes down; they force tremendous rapids, whirlpools, and roaring falls. Where the water's calm in the valleys, eagles and fish-hawks harry them, and the mink hunts them in the shallows. But they can't be stopped; they follow Nature's urge and shove on across all obstacles for the distant gravel banks. Then they spawn, where they were hatched, and the bears eat their spent carcasses. The trouble is, I'm not a bear, but I've got to eat salmon."

When the Indian had fried two or three thick steaks, Jimmy sympathized with Deering. The flesh was soft and its taste was rank. For all that, he thought if he had not seen the salmon he might have had a better appetite. At the hotel he had eaten because his food tempted him; now he ate because he must. By and by he threw down his tin plate.

"I've had enough. If we can find a deer, we must risk another cartridge. We have got twelve."

"You can't reckon on getting a deer for every shot, and although, as a rule, the deer are pretty numerous about the small clearings, in some belts of back country you can't find one. I expect they're attracted by the crops. In fact, the wild animals and large birds aren't much afraid of the ranchers; they quit when the automobiles and city sports arrive."

"But if we stop in the neighbourhood of a settle-

ment, the police may get on our trail," Jimmy rejoined.

"The police are smart and I allow they're obstinate. All the same, to search the rocks from Banff to Revelstoke is a big job. You can give yourself away by two things, shooting and smoke, but we can fix the smoke and we're not going to shoot much. As soon as we hit a proper spot, we'll build a shack."

"By and by our supplies will run out."

"That is so," Deering agreed. "In the meantime, we're baffling the police. Just now I expect they're busy looking for our tracks, but they have got other jobs and can't keep it up. Well, when we think they're forced to quit, we'll find a plan——"

He stopped and the Indian turned his head. A faint, hoarse bark came from the distance and echoed across the valley. Jimmy jumped up and looked about. The light was going and the pines were blurred.

"A dog?" he said.

"A timber wolf," said Deering. "He's not alone. I hear another."

A howl, pitched on a high mournful note, pierced the gloom and Jimmy shivered. The noise was strangely dreary.

"Will the wolves bother us?"

"I think not," said Deering and talked in Chinook to the Indian, who nodded. "The fellow agrees," he resumed. "In North Ontario we watch out for wolves when the snow is on the ground, but as a rule in British Columbia they leave the ranchers

alone. Sometimes they take a sheep; I reckon that's all. The trouble is, they kill deer, and when the wolves start hunting the deer pull out."

Jimmy got down on his blanket by the fire. He felt the wilds were daunting and to see the flame leap about the branches was some comfort. Now and then a wolf howled in the distance, but by and by all was quiet and he went to sleep.

XIX

USEFUL FRIENDS

BREAKFAST was over and, although Jimmy would have liked another bannock, he got up and strapped on his pack. Deering needed the bannock, for flour was running out. A fire burned on the stone hearth and the little shack in a corner of the rocks was warm. Jimmy did not want to leave it, but he knew he must, and the Indian waited for him to start.

They had not killed a deer and although they had shot two or three blue grouse a blue grouse is not large. Sometimes one can knock down a little willow grouse with a stick, but the willow grouse had recently vanished and the Indian had caught nothing in his snares. In fact, it looked as if all the birds and animals had gone south. Jimmy had eaten salmon until he loathed the battered fish, but the salmon had begun to die.

"Your load's not big," said Deering. "Have you put up all the food you need?"

"I've got all the food I'm going to take," Jimmy rejoined. "I can load up at Kelshope, but you must wait until I get back."

"Oh, well; but since I know the bush and might make better time, you ought to let me go."

"You're obstinate," said Jimmy. "I know Jardine and we want his help."

"That is so," said Deering and gave him his hand. "Anyhow, you have got the Indian and I expect he'll hit the shortest line. I wish you luck."

Jimmy pulled up his pack and set off. Speed was important, for he imagined he had left Deering a larger supply of food than the other knew. Since he was going to Kelshope, he could get fresh supplies, but Deering could not. Yet if he was longer than he calculated, it would be awkward. Jimmy felt lonely and rather daunted. The shack was small and rude, but the bark walls kept out the wind and in the cold evenings he had liked to sit by the snapping fire.

Now the trackless wilderness was in front, and he must get across before his food was gone. He did get across, but he imagined the Indian's inherited talents accounted for his doing so. Jimmy himself did not know much about the journey. When he thought about it afterwards, he dully pictured the fatigue and strain, the sharpening pinch of hunger and the stern effort to push on.

At length they came down the rocks one morning and saw his clearing in the distance. Jimmy gave the Indian all the food he had, and telling him to camp at the ranch, started for Jardine's. He was hungry and for a day or two his side had hurt. Sometimes he was faint, and when he crossed a stony belt he stumbled awkwardly. For all

that, in the evening he reached the split-rail fence at Kelshope.

Jimmy knew how one pulled out the bars, but they baffled him and he knocked down the crossed supports. In front of the house he stopped, for a flickering light shone from the window and he saw Margaret sewing by the fire. His broken boots and torn clothes embarrassed him, but he braced up and went to the door.

Margaret put down her sewing and her look was rather strained. Jimmy leaned against the table and gave her an apologetic smile. His hair was long, his beard had begun to grow and his face was pinched. His ragged clothes looked slack and although he had given the Indian his blanket, his shoulders were bent from weariness.

"Oh, Mr. Leyland!" Margaret exclaimed in a pitiful voice.

"To my friends, I'm Jimmy," he rejoined. "To know you and your father are my friends is some comfort, because I'm going to use your friendship. Besides, I rather think I don't look like Mr. Leyland."

Margaret's voice was gentle and she said, "Very well, Jimmy! But where have you come from?"

"I started, about a week since, from our bark shack across the range, but I don't know much about it. The Indian's at my ranch and can hold out until the morning. I want to borrow some cartridges and food."

"Why of course!" said Margaret and indicated a chair. "I'll get supper ready. Father's at the depôt, but we won't wait for him."

Jimmy got into the chair; for he imagined he did not sit down gracefully. The deerskin was soft and his head went back against the rail. Now he was not forced to keep going, he knew he was very tired. Margaret began to move about and by and by he asked: "Can't I help?"

Margaret looked up with a smile. "No, Jimmy. I have not much use for the help you could give."

Jimmy was satisfied to rest. He was dull, but he liked to see Margaret break up the fire and carry about the plates. She was very graceful and he knew her sympathetic, but this was not all. After the lonely bush, the ranch kitchen, lighted by the snapping flames, was like home. When supper was ready it cost him something of an effort to pull round his chair, and then for a time he tried to conquer his savage appetite. When one was opposite an attractive girl one did not eat like a wolf. Margaret knew the bush and smiled.

"Isn't the food good? I really think I can cook."

"My notion is, the best hotel cook in Canada could not serve a supper like yours."

"Very well," said Margaret. "If you are polite, you will annoy me. What did you eat in the bush?"

"Salmon! When I see a river, I want to go the other way."

"Oh!" said Margaret. "You ate salmon now?"

"When they began to float up on the stones, we stopped," Jimmy replied.

Margaret was moved. She knew the trackless bush sometimes was cruel and all who felt its

lure did not return. Sometimes one, crossing a creek, lost a load of food, and sometimes one's rifle jambed. Then, if the march to the settlements were long, one starved. Jimmy had not starved, but he was worn and thin.

"The coffee's very good; may I have some more?" he resumed. "We used green tea, because it's light and goes far; but I mustn't bother you about our housekeeping. Do you know if the police have brought back the game warden?"

"They arrived some time since and put Douglas on the cars. A doctor went with him——"

"Then he's alive?" said Jimmy, with keen relief.

"He was badly hurt, but that is all I know," Margaret replied. "Nobody was allowed to see him——" She stopped and resumed with some hesitation: "Mr. Stannard's packers stated——"

Jimmy gave her a steady glance. "It looks as I shot Douglas; in the dark, I thought him a deer. You did not imagine I meant to hurt the man?"

"I know you did not," said Margaret in a quiet voice.

"Very well. I must tell you all I know, but I'll wait until your father arrives. Perhaps he'll see a fresh light. Sometimes I'm puzzled——"

"You mustn't bother to talk," said Margaret. "Turn your chair to the fire and take a smoke."

Jimmy pulled out his tobacco pouch and frowned. Margaret saw the pouch was flat and took a plug of tobacco from a shelf.

"Wait a moment; don't get up," she said and began to cut the plug.

For a few moments Jimmy watched her with dull satisfaction. She cut the tobacco in thin, even slices; Jimmy had remarked before that all Margaret did was properly done. Although it was nearly dark, she had not got a light, and red and yellow reflections from the logs played about the room. Sometimes her eyes and hair shone and her face stood out against a background of shadow. Jimmy thought the picture charming and when it melted he waited for the flames to leap again, but by and by it got indistinct.

"Give me your pouch," said Margaret and he tried to push it across.

The pouch fell from the table and his pipe went down. His head leaned to one side and found the chair rail, and he knew nothing more.

Margaret heard his sigh and was quiet. Now sleep smoothed out the marks of strain and fatigue, Jimmy's look was boyishly calm. He moved her to pity, but he moved her to trust. Margaret was not a raw, romantic girl; she knew the Canadian cities and she had studied men. If Jimmy had, indeed, shot the agent, a strange blunder accounted for his doing so, but Margaret doubted. She had some grounds to think the shot another's. Then she got up quietly and carried off the plates.

Some time afterwards Jardine came in and, seeing Jimmy, stopped and turned to Margaret. It was typical that he said nothing, but his glance was keen. Margaret smiled and in a low voice narrated all she knew. Jardine nodded, and sitting down, waited until Jimmy's head slipped from the chair rail and the jerk woke him up. He

looked about as if he were puzzled, and then said, "Hallo, Mr. Jardine! I didn't understand your sitting opposite me. I expect I was asleep."

"Sure thing," Jardine agreed with a twinkle. "We have sortit the bit back room for ye and ye had better go to bed."

"I'm not going yet," said Jimmy. "I want a smoke, but my tobacco's run out."

Margaret gave him his pouch and he smiled. "The tobacco's yours, sir. Miss Jardine is very kind. Well, I reckoned on her kindness, because I want to borrow a quantity of truck, but we'll talk about this again. Do you know where Stannard is?"

"Stannard and his daughter are at the hotel," Jardine replied and looked at Jimmy rather hard. "Maybe he feels he ought to stop until the police have settled who shot warden Douglas."

"But Stannard had nothing to do with it," Jimmy rejoined.

"He was leader o' your party and, in a way, accountable. Maybe ye ken Okanagan started for the bush soon after ye went?"

"I didn't know," said Jimmy with some surprise. "Bob claimed he hadn't a gun and I think he had not. Sometimes I'm puzzled, but I really think the unlucky shot was mine."

"The packers allood it was yours, although they werena sure how many shots they heard. Can ye locate the others' stands?"

"I tried, afterwards. In the evenings when we camped in the woods I speculated about the

accident," said Jimmy, and pulling out a few small objects arranged them to indicate the spots the sportsmen had occupied. " If you will imagine the table's the clearing, Bob posted us something like this—Well I imagine the warden was going straight for my stand behind the stump."

" Ye're thinking aboot the bullet mark in front," said Jardine. " The packers telt me aboot it. Did ye see the other mark ? "

" I did not," said Jimmy with a shiver. " When we carried Douglas to the house I'd had enough. But I don't see where you lead."

" If the mark at the back was at the middle, he was going straight for you. Weel, I'll take a smoke——"

He knitted his brows and for some minutes quietly studied Jimmy's plan of the clearing. Then he said, " It's no' as plain as it looks, but the packers reckoned two o' the police who went in with the doctor were pretty good bushmen. We dinna ken what they think. Anyhow, ye're going to sleep and ought to go to bed."

Jimmy went and Jardine resumed his study. Margaret left him alone. In Scotland her father was a poacher ; in the Canadian woods his rifle supplied the ranch with meat. One could trust his judgment about shooting. By and by he looked up.

" If Jimmy has fixed their stands right, it's possible he shot Douglas and he reckons he did so. That's something ; but he has a kind o' notion he heard another shot. Weel, the lad's a tenderfoot. Maybe he was excited and did not hold straight."

"*Bob* would not get excited and he can hit a jumping deer," said Margaret.

Jardine nodded meaningly. "I've thought aboot Bob! The warden was after him and he lit oot. There's the puzzle for the police; three o' the party quit!"

"Mr. Deering went because he is Jimmy's friend," said Margaret.

"Just that! Ye can trust the big fellow," Jardine agreed. "Then, if he was where Jimmy puts him, he didna shoot. Stannard stopped and it looks as if he had nothing to do wi' it; but I dinna ken. Stannard's no' a man ye can reckon up, and a line from his stand would cut the warden's track."

"But the bullet mark——"

Jardine smiled. "Jimmy, and maybe the trooper lad, would think that fixed it, but he didna look where the bullet *cam' oot.* I wonder if Stannard looked."

"Bob is accountable," said Margaret obstinately.

"Verra weel. Bob's in the rocks. What are ye for doing aboot it?"

"By and by he must come down for food. When he does come down we'll try to find him."

"Bob's a good bushman," Jardine remarked. "I alloo the police will not hit his trail, but maybe he will not bother to watch out for us——" He stopped and gave Margaret a thoughtful look when he resumed: "Bob would reckon to find out who shot Douglas; it is no' our job."

"The job is ours," said Margaret quietly, but Jardine thought the blood came to her skin. She,

however, got up and when she had put out the plates for breakfast went to bed.

In the morning Jardine gave Jimmy boots and clothes, and two days afterwards loaded him with all the supplies he would carry. After breakfast Jimmy strapped on his pack, but when he was ready to go he hesitated. The loghouse was warm and home-like, and for two days he had rested and enjoyed Margaret's society. Now he must plunge into the wilds, he frowned. The snow was creeping down the rocks and a cold wind wailed in the dark pine-tops. Then Jimmy turned to his hosts and forced a smile.

"You have given me all I needed; I knew you would see me out."

"Sure thing," said Jardine. "In the bush, your friends' job is to see ye oot."

"You are useful friends," Jimmy replied with a touch of emotion. "All the same, I feel I ought not to bother you; I ought to start for the railroad and give myself up to the police. If Douglas was hurt by my carelessness, I ought to pay."

"You mustn't go yet," said Margaret firmly. "You don't altogether know the carelessness was yours, and perhaps it was not. Somehow I think we will find out."

"Ah," said Jimmy, "if you do find out the shot wasn't mine—— But I doubt and the doubt weighs on me."

Margaret smiled and gave him her hand. "Brace up and trust your luck! Stop in the mountains until we send for you. Perhaps we will send for you sooner than you think."

Jimmy went down the path and joined the waiting Indian. He was comforted, and when he plunged into the woods his moodiness was gone. Margaret went back into the house and Jardine said in a thoughtful voice, "Ye kind o' engaged ye'd send for the lad; but until ye satisfy the police he's no' their man, he canna come back."

"That is so. The thing is rather obvious," Margaret agreed and smiled. "However, since I did engage to send for Jimmy, I must try to make good."

XX

BOB'S DENIAL

NOT long after Jimmy's visit to Kelshope, Margaret one evening rode up the trail from the station. Her cayuse carried a load of groceries, but when she set off her object was not altogether to bring home supplies. Wakening before daybreak, she imagined she heard the fence-rails rattle at the corner farthest from the house. Sometimes a deer jumped the fence, and when Margaret got up she went to the spot. She saw no tracks, but some time afterwards found a footmark where the trail left the clearing. The mark was fresh and she thought it was not made by her father's boot.

Margaret said nothing to Jardine. Had a stranger come down the valley, he would have pulled out the slip-rails, because in the dark the belt of slashing that generally surrounds a forest ranch is an awkward obstacle. Moreover, to account for a stranger's coming from the mountains was hard. Had Jimmy returned, he would have stopped at the house; but Bob would not and Margaret had engaged to find Bob.

When the Vancouver train rolled into the station nobody got on board, but a police trooper came from the agent's office, and going along the line,

looked into the cars. Margaret had not remarked him before the train stopped and thought his curiosity ominous. If Bob had stolen past the ranch, he, however, had not tried to get on board and was hiding somewhere about. Margaret was puzzled and resolved to stop at the hotel and see Stannard. She admitted that her resolve was perhaps not logical, because if Stannard knew more about the shooting than others, he would not enlighten her. All the same, she meant to see him.

Getting down where the wagon road went round to the front of the hotel, she tied her horse to a tree and took a path across the hill. The trees were thick, but the moon was bright and in places its beams pierced the wood. In front and some distance above her, she saw illuminated windows at the top of the hotel; then the terrace wall cut the reflection from the drawing-room and rotunda. The high wall was in the gloom, but at the bottom pools of silver light broke the dark shadow of the trees. Margaret knew the steps to the terrace. Had she gone to the front door, she must have stopped at the office until a page brought Stannard, and she thought she would sooner find him in the rotunda before he knew she was about.

She heard music in the drawing-room and somebody on the terrace talking, but the wall was high and when the music stopped all was quiet. In the woods one lifts one's feet with mechanical caution and Margaret was a rancher's daughter. Her advance was noiseless, but at a bend of the path she stopped.

A few yards off, a man stood under a tree. His back was to Margaret, but the dark object across his shoulder was a slung rifle and she thought she knew him. Stannard leaned against a trunk opposite. He wore dinner dress and a loose light coat. He was in the moonlight, and when he shook his head Margaret thought his smile ironical. The other's pose was stiff and his fist was clenched. Margaret put her hand in the pocket of her deerskin coat and then moved a branch. The man turned and his hand went to his rifle. Margaret heard the sling rattle.

"You don't want your gun, Bob; I know you. Besides, I've got a pistol," she said.

Bob swore softly and Stannard lifted his hat.

"Aren't you rather theatrical, Miss Jardine? I imagined gun pulling was out of date."

"Bob's theatrical; but he's *slow*," Margaret rejoined, and although her heart beat her voice was steady. "I haven't yet pulled my gun."

"It looks as if you had better leave yours alone," Stannard remarked to Bob.

Bob's face got very dark, but Stannard smiled.

"Did you want to see me or the other, Miss Jardine?"

"I want to see Bob first, but you may stop," said Margaret and gave Bob a searching glance. "Who shot warden Douglas?"

"I did not, anyhow," Bob replied fiercely. "I hadn't a gun and when I'd fixed the others I put out my lamp. I'd no liking for using the pit-light. The fool plan was Deering's."

"All the same, you quit!"

"I sure quit. Somebody shot Douglas and the police knew he'd got a pick on me. They'd got to put the shooting on one of the gang."

"Perhaps it's important the police knew you had a pick on Douglas," Stannard remarked.

"For all that, I didn't use my gun," Bob rejoined.

Margaret pondered. As a rule, Bob was marked by a rather sinister quietness, but now he talked with something like passion. He had stepped forward and a moonbeam touched his face. Margaret thought he knew, but he did not move out of the light. Somehow she felt she must believe his statement. Then Stannard turned to her.

"Perhaps it's strange, but I rather think he speaks the truth."

"If you did not use your gun, who did shoot Douglas?" Margaret resumed, looking at Bob. "I want to know. A trooper's watching the station, and if I shout, the hotel clerk will call him on the 'phone."

Bob's passion vanished and Margaret thought his calm ominous.

"That's another thing! Looks as if Jimmy plugged the fellow. He sort of allowed he done it and he started for the rocks."

"I imagine Bob doesn't know," said Stannard. "Before you arrived he implied that I was accountable and demanded a hundred dollars. In fact, when he didn't get the sum he was much annoyed."

"I was mad all right," Bob agreed. "My flour and tea's gone, and I can't hire up about the settlements, but if I'd a hundred dollars, I'd try to make the coast." He looked hard at Stannard and

resumed: "Are you going to help me get off?"

"Certainly not," said Stannard in a careless voice. "I am not as rich as you think, and to give you money would be rash, particularly when Miss Jardine is about."

Margaret pulled out her wallet. "I can give you ten dollars, Bob; but I can shout to the people at the hotel. You know Mr. Leyland did not shoot Douglas."

"I sure don't know," said Bob and gave Margaret a haughty glance. "Put up your wad; I've no use for your money. If you like, shout for them to 'phone the police."

For a moment or two Margaret hesitated. She was persuaded Bob himself was not accountable, but she thought this was all she would know. She was hurt and humiliated, for now she had found Bob she had not helped Jimmy much.

"Shall I shout?" she asked Stannard.

"To choose is your part. I rather think Dillon is on the terrace and two or three athletic young sportsmen are at the hotel, but unless you are willing to use your gun, I doubt if Bob would stop until the others arrive. Then, although I don't knew where Jimmy is, perhaps for the police to search the neighbourhood would have some drawbacks."

Margaret turned to Bob. "Get off! If you come back, I'll send the troopers after you."

Bob went, and when he vanished in the gloom Stannard laughed. "I expect your arrival disturbed the fellow. At the beginning, he tried to force me to give him my wallet; then he took

another line and hinted that Leyland was accountable. Well, he has gone. Will you come back with me and talk to Laura?"

Margaret noted that he was not curious about her grounds for stopping at the hotel, but she said, "I wanted to see you. What do you know about the accident?"

"I really don't know much, although I am persuaded accident is the proper word. Jimmy thought the unlucky shot was his and when he resolved to go off I agreed."

"But you knew what the police would think about his running away!"

"That is so," said Stannard coolly. "All the same, Jimmy was with me when I killed the bighorn, and when Douglas found us at the old ranch we were using pit-lights. One of our party shot him, and since we were again poaching, it hardly looked as if the shot were accidental. Jimmy is young and when he saw the risk he ran he was afraid. I thought he did run some risk, but, if he could cheat the police for a time, we might find a clue to the puzzle."

Margaret remarked his frankness. Although she thought he did not know Jimmy had stopped at the ranch, his arguments were the arguments Jimmy stated he had used. Moreover, she admitted the arguments carried some weight.

"We have not yet found a clue," she said drearily. "Still, if the warden gets better—— Do you know where he is?"

For a moment or two Stannard was quiet. Then he said, "We can get no news about Douglas, and

perhaps we ought not to expect much from his narrative. When you use a pit-lamp your hat-brim shades your face, and I imagine all Douglas saw was the light. Yet the police's reserve is strange."

"Perhaps they know something we do not," said Margaret. "Well, my father is waiting and I must not stop."

She went off and Stannard went up the steps to the hotel. In a corner of the veranda Dillon talked to Laura and Stannard remarked the smile she gave the young man. Stannard knitted his brows and did not stop. In some respects, the marriage would be good, but it was not the marriage he had wanted Laura to make. All the same, Jimmy was obviously satisfied with the bush girl and Stannard thought she loved him. Well, he had done with Jimmy.

When Margaret got down at the ranch she went to the kitchen and sat by the fire. For a time she said nothing and Jardine quietly smoked his pipe. Then she looked up with a frown.

"I found Bob," she said. "He was talking to Mr. Stannard outside the hotel."

"In the trees, I'm thinking! Did he tell ye much?"

"He declared when they used the pit-lights he had not a gun and somehow I think he hadn't."

"Maybe!" said Jardine, with some dryness. "Was it all ye got?"

"That was all. I'm not as clever as I thought. Bob wanted Mr. Stannard to give him a hundred dollars."

"Ah!" said Jardine. "Weel, I expect ye see——"

"Stannard *laughed*. It was plain he was not at all afraid of Bob."

"Stannard's no' a fool," Jardine remarked.

"I thought his carelessness sincere. Besides, Bob soon afterwards implied that Jimmy hit Douglas. I imagine Bob really doesn't know who did use his gun."

"It's possible," Jardine agreed. "My notion is, Jimmy had better keep the woods. In the meantime, I've no use for Bob's hanging round the ranch."

"Bob will not bother us; I don't think he'll bother Mr. Stannard again," said Margaret and got some sewing.

XXI

DEERING'S EXCURSION

RAIN beat the bark roof and heavy drops splashed on the floor. Sometimes a gust of wind swept the window opening and the smoke blew about, but on the whole the shack was dry and warm. Jimmy thought they had made a good job, and sitting by the fire, he tranquilly smoked his pipe. The Indian, opposite him, plaited a snare; Deering studied a card problem in an old newspaper.

"The game's pretty good, but I soon got on to it," he said. "When you locate the bower—— Come across and I'll show you."

"No, thanks," said Jimmy, smiling. "To know where the bower is, is useful, but sometimes you don't know and a ten-spot knocks you out. Things are like that. Anyhow I've not much use for cards."

"You were keen. I reckon your keenness cost you something!"

Jimmy nodded. "That is so; but I really think I wanted to satisfy my curiosity. I wanted the thrills others seemed to get, and I experimented with cards and two or three expensive sports. Now I feel I'd sooner build a shack than win a pot of

money on a first-class race. The strange thing is, when I was at the cotton mill and Dick wanted me to study the machinery, I was bored."

"I expect he tried to force you," Deering remarked. "When one is young one doesn't study the things others think one ought——" He frowned and jerked his head. "Another blamed big drop on the back of my neck!"

"When the rain stops I'll mend the roof," said Jimmy. "The shack's a pretty good shack and two or three slabs of bark will cure the leak. Then I must get some green clay and flat stones for the chimney."

"You talk as if you meant to stop in the rocks!"

"It looks as if I might have to stop for some time."

Deering shook his head. "In a proper cold snap you want double windows, but we have got a hole. Then I've not much use for a blanket door. When the frost begins we have got to quit."

"But where can we go."

"I don't know yet; I have thought about your ranch. Jardine stated the police had searched it, and I reckon they won't come back. However, we'll talk about this again. I think Miss Jardine gave you a needle and thread?"

Jimmy said Margaret had done so and inquired why Deering wanted the thread.

"We can't get out and I guess I'll sew my clothes for you. In the morning I'm going to use Jardine's."

"But why——" Jimmy began.

Deering indicated his torn shooting-jacket, ragged knickerbockers, and soil-stained puttees.

" I must start for Vancouver, to look up a fellow who has got some money of mine. Then I want to find out if the police have cured Douglas and what they are doing. If I wore my clothes, people would speculate about the dead-broke sporting guy."

" Jardine's clothes are not very good ; I've worn them for some time in the bush. Then I expect you'll find them tight."

" They're a rancher's clothes and I don't mind looking like a bushman. In fact, until I make Vancouver, the part will fit all right."

Jimmy knitted his brows. Perhaps he had thought too much for himself, but he owned he did not want to let Deering go.

" Well," he said, " I mustn't grumble. But will you be long ? "

" When I've fixed my business and found out something useful I'll come right back," Deering replied and threading the needle began to sew. " I was raised in the bush and the small homesteaders are a pretty frugal lot. They don't throw away their old clothes."

" When you reach the settlements, won't you run some risk ? " Jimmy inquired.

" I expect the risk will not be altogether mine. So far as I know, the police are not looking for me. The trouble is, I might put them on your track ; but so long as I'm steering for the coast this needn't bother us. I don't want them to hit my trail when I'm coming back. Well, I'm pretty big to hide, but if they are after me, they'll watch out for a city sport, not a bushman."

In the morning Deering started, and after a

strenuous journey reached a small station some distance from the hotel. He did not buy his ticket from the agent; the conductor would supply him, and when the long trail rolled in he got on board. The porter was making up the second-class berths and when Deering got his he went to bed. So far, his luck was good, but after he had slept for five or six hours he began to doubt.

A savage jolt threw him against the curtain, and the thin material tore from the rings. Deering went through, but came down like a cat on the floor. The brakes jarred and startled passengers ran about. For the most part, they did not wear their proper clothes, but when Deering went to bed he wore all his and he pushed through a group that blocked the vestibule. The train stopped and from the platform he saw a leaping pillar of flame and reflections on rocks and trees. The white beam from the locomotive headlamp melted in the strong illumination, and moving figures cut the dark background. The picture was distinct and vivid like a scene from a film, until a cloud of steam rolled across the light and all was blurred.

Deering heard hammers and the clang of rails. A construction gang was obviously at work and he inferred a trestle had broken or perhaps another train had jumped the track. When he waited at the station, he had not tried to hide himself; to do so was risky, since he imagined the police had warned the agent to study the passengers. If the agent had remarked him, the delay would be awkward and he wondered whether the telegraph wires were broken.

Jumping down, he went along the track and stopped in the strong light a blast-lamp threw across a gap. The road-bed was gone and a great bank of stones and snow rested on the hillside. Bent rails slanted into the hole and a broken telegraph pole hung by the tangled wires. Shovels rattled and a gang of men threw down soil and stones. Deering stopped one.

"How long is it since the land-slide cut the track?"

"About two hours since we got the call."

"Then, they rushed you up pretty quick. I expect you got the call by wire?"

The other indicated the broken post. "Wires went when the track went. The section man came for us on a trolly; we're grading for a new bridge a few miles down the line."

"Are you going to be long filling her up?"

"Three or four hours, I reckon. The boys are loading up the gravel train. But if the boss spots me talking, I'll get fired."

Deering pondered. If the agent had been warned to look out for him, the fellow had had time to telegraph before the wires broke, and the police could arrange to watch the stations or put a trooper on board the train. Deering did not know if they had a warrant for his arrest, but they would try to use him in order to get on Jimmy's track. There was not much use in leaving the train, because he would be spotted when he boarded another. He resolved to go back to his berth and soon after he did so he went to sleep.

In the morning the train started. Deering got

a good breakfast at a meal station and afterwards occupied a corner of a smoking compartment. Sleep and food had refreshed him and his mood was cheerful. He admitted he was perhaps ridiculous, but he had begun to enjoy his excursion ; Deering was marked by a vein of rather boyish humour and to cheat the police amused him. By and by he speculated about his object for going after Jimmy when the warden was shot.

Jimmy had plunged into the gully sooner than let him go, but perhaps this did not account for all. Stannard had urged Jimmy to push for the plains, although Stannard ought to know the lad could not cross the mountains. Then he had indicated a line over the neck and Deering had stopped Jimmy at the top of a pitch that dropped to a horrible crevasse. The thing was strange and sinister, but Jimmy trusted Stannard. Deering did not. He was intrigued, and felt he ought to see Jimmy out.

After a time a police trooper came from the vestibule and stopped for a moment at the door of the smoking compartment. His glance rested carelessly on Deering, and then he went through into the car. At the next station the policeman got down and went to the office. When the train started Deering did not see him get on board, but people moved about and the end cars were behind the water tank.

In the afternoon, when he leaned back, half asleep, in his corner, the trooper came in again. Deering did not move, but his eyes were not altogether shut and he saw the fellow's glance was keen and fixed. In a moment or two the trooper turned

his head, and going into the vestibule, did not shut the door quietly. Deering's curiosity was satisfied; the police knew he was on board.

Lighting his pipe, he looked out of the window. The train was speeding down the lower Fraser valley. Orchards, fields with white snake-fences, and wooden homesteads rolled by. The sun was near the hilltops and the shadows of the pines were long. When they reached Vancouver it would be dark and the trooper's duties would be undertaken by the municipal police. The Royal North-West had nothing to do with the British-Columbian cities; their business was in the wilds.

Deering pulled out his watch. A short distance from Vancouver they would stop at a junction where a line for Washington State branched off, but his business was not in Washington.

Fast steamers sailed from Vancouver for the ports on Puget Sound, and since the police would expect him to go on board, he thought he saw a plan. Some time after dark he went to the platform in front of the car. A half-moon shone between slow-moving clouds and he saw vague hills and sparkling water. Then the lights of anchored steamers began to twinkle and sawmill chimney stacks cut the sky. Lights in rows and clusters marked the front of a low hill, the cars rolled along the waterside, and presently stacks of lumber blocked the view. Then the whistle screamed, the brakes jarred, and the passengers began to push out from the vestibule.

Deering jumped down and looked about. Freight cars occupied the tracks and the dazzling beam from a locomotive's headlamp touched piles of goods and

hurrying people. Round the tall electric standards were pools of light, but smoke and steam blew about the wharf and where the strong illumination was cut off all was dark. Bells tolled, wheels rattled, and the clang of the steamer's winches pierced the din. Her double row of passenger decks towered above the wharf, and Deering joined the crowd at the slanted gangway. He was willing for the city police to see him board the steamer.

At the top of the gangway a steward indicated the way to the second-class deck, but Deering pushed by and went to the saloon. Since he was playing a bush rancher's part, the police would expect him to travel second class, and he must for a few minutes put them off his track. As soon as the luggage was on board, the boat would start.

For the most part, the people were on deck, and the spacious saloon was quiet. Deering thought he did not look like a first-class passenger. His hair was long, his hat was battered, and Jardine's rather ragged clothes were tight on his big body. Searching the room with a keen glance, he stopped, for a group of three people occupied a seat at the other end. He wondered whether he ought to steal off, but Dillon jumped up.

"Why, it's Deering!" he exclaimed.

Laura started and her companion turned. Deering imagined the lady was Mrs. Dillon and he crossed the floor. Dillon's surprise was obvious, but he gave Deering his hand.

"We have been bothered about you for some time and it looks as if you had got up against it. But where's Jimmy?"

"Jimmy's at the shack we built in the rocks. What about the warden?"

"We can get no news. I imagine the police are hiding the fellow."

"Why did you leave Jimmy?" Laura interrupted, and Deering saw she did not altogether trust him. "Has he food and proper clothes? If he is in trouble, we must try to help."

"That is so," said Dillon. "If Jimmy wants me, I'll get off the boat."

"Jimmy's clothes are worse than mine, but he doesn't particularly want your help. I pulled out because I must transact some business, and I've pretty good grounds to imagine the police are on my track."

"I expect we'll sail in a few minutes," said Dillon. "Do you think the police know you got on board?"

Deering glanced at the others. He thought Laura imagined he had meant to join them and she was not yet satisfied. Mrs. Dillon was frankly annoyed.

"So long as they don't know I got off again, it's not important," he replied.

"Are you going to get off?"

"Certainly," said Deering and turned to Laura with a twinkle. "The trick is not remarkably fresh, but since the police reckon I'm bound for the United States, it ought to work. You see, Jimmy's my friend, and when I've put across my business I'm going back."

Laura gave him her hand. "I didn't know—I wish you luck! When you think we can help, you must send us a letter."

The whistle blew, a bell rang, and people began to enter the saloon.

"Thank you, Miss Stannard," said Deering and crossed the floor.

He went along an alley and through the second-class saloon to the deck in front. The steamer's bows were in the gloom and a number of wharf-hands were hurried down a plank. Deering joined the row and followed the men to a cargo shed. The shed was dark, but the sliding doors on the other side were open and he crawled under a freight car and crossed the track. A minute or two afterwards he stopped. So far as he could see, nobody but a few train-hands were about; the steamer had swung away from the wharf and was steering for the Narrows. Deering laughed and went up the hill behind the water-front.

XXII

DEERING TAKES COUNSEL

A CANADIAN hotel is something of an inexpensive club. People who sleep elsewhere come for meals, and a number come to smoke and talk. In Western towns their manners and clothes are marked by sharp contrasts, but so long as they observe a few primitive rules, nobody inquires if they are customers of the house.

In consequence, when Deering stopped in front of an ambitious building he was not at all embarrassed. The noise he heard indicated that the rotunda was occupied, but while some of its occupants were, no doubt, important citizens, he expected to find lumbermen and miners from the bush whose clothes were like his. Pushing round the revolving doors, he went in, waited until he saw the clerk was engaged, and then went upstairs. A noisy electric elevator was running, but Deering thought he would not bother the boy.

On the second landing he opened a door. An electric lamp threw a strong light about the room, and a gentleman leaned back in a hardwood chair and rested his feet on the ornamental radiator. He was dressed like a prosperous citizen, and he gave Deering a keen glance.

"Hallo!" he said. "Have you been in the woods?"

"Looks like that!" said Deering. "I want a razor and a bath; then I want a suit of clothes, the biggest standard size. I doubt if the clerk and bell-boys saw a bushman come up, but if they did so, I'd sooner they didn't see him come down."

"I can fix you," said the other, smiling. "All the same, I expect you must get a barber to finish the job."

When Deering used a glass he admitted that his friend's remark was justified, but so long as he looked like a wild man from the woods, to recline, wrapped in a white sheet, in a barber's front window had obvious drawbacks. As a rule, a North American barber carries on his occupation as publicly as possible. He got a bath, and when he returned to his friend's room Neilson gave him a cigar and they began to talk.

"Very well," said Neilson, "I can get the money for you and will soon fix up the other matters. I have sent for some clothes and booked your room. But you look as if you'd hit some adventures in the woods, and I'd rather like to know——"

"Perhaps you noted something in the newspapers about a game-warden's getting shot?"

"The *Colonist* printed a short paragraph; I imagined the police edited the story. Old man Salter knows his job, although the shooting was on the Royal North-West's ground. Anyhow, the tale left you to guess. But were you in it?"

"Sure thing," said Deering, drily. "I'll tell you——"

When he finished his narrative, Neilson knitted his brows. He was frankly an adventurer, but he had his code and Deering trusted the fellow. Moreover, Neilson knew men, and particularly men who lived by exploiting others' weaknesses.

"I'm not a hunter. We'll cut out the shooting and concentrate on the gang," he said. "I want to get Stannard right. His occupation's ours?"

"Something like ours," Deering agreed. "We play a straight game, because we know a straight game pays; I've spotted Stannard using a crook's cheap trick. But he doesn't bet high at cards. His line's financing extravagant young suckers."

"Then, he's rich?"

"I think not. Not long since he wanted money. My notion is, he's got a partner in the Old Country who supplies him. Stannard's something of a highbrow and a smart clubman. He has qualities—— I rather like the fellow, although I know him."

"What about the girl? Does Stannard use her?"

"Not at all," said Deering. "Miss Laura's straight; I doubt if she really knows her father's occupation. Maybe she's ambitious and calculating, but she's not his sort."

"Is Leyland much in Stannard's debt?"

"Stannard's an expensive friend; but I guess he wanted Jimmy for Laura and didn't take all he might. Still I expect Jimmy owes a useful sum, and Laura's going to marry Dillon."

"Ah," said Neilson, "perhaps that's important! I reckon Stannard has got Leyland insured?"

Deering nodded. He saw where Neilson's remarks led and on the whole agreed. He had given the

fellow his confidence because he wanted to see the arguments another would use.

"Well," resumed Neilson, "what about Dillon and your guide?"

"Dillon was not in the woods. I don't know much about the guide. Bob's a queer fellow and is not all white. Then he has a pick on Jimmy. I reckon he took a shine to the rancher's daughter who is now Jimmy's girl."

"Jealousy bites hard, and I wouldn't trust a breed," Neilson remarked. "Well, perhaps we have got Bob's object; let's study Stannard's. Leyland's wanting the ranch girl wasn't in his plan, and when he knew Miss Stannard meant to marry Dillon he'd make another. Leyland owes him much, can't pay yet, and is insured. Let it go in the meantime, and weigh another thing. Leyland doesn't altogether know if he shot the warden, but if he did shoot him, he thought him a deer. All the same, he pulled out! Is the boy a fool? Is his nerve weak?"

"Jimmy's clean grit," said Deering. "Still he is a boy."

"Then it's possible he got rattled. Suppose when he was rattled an older man he trusted put it up to him that he ought to light out? The kid wouldn't ponder; he'd start."

"That is so," said Deering. "Stannard did talk like that."

Neilson shrugged meaningly. "Very well! I'm through with my argument. If we could find warden Douglas, he might tell us something useful. I'll try."

Deering thought the plan good. Neilson was a gambler, but his word went; in fact, Deering believed it sometimes went with the police. Neilson knew the half-world, and now he had undertaken an awkward job strange helpers would be put to work.

When he had lighted a fresh cigar he resumed: "I don't see *your* object for hiding in the woods."

"Sometimes I'm romantic; you don't know me yet," Deering said and laughed. "Jimmy's my pal; when I came near getting a fall that would have knocked me out, he held me up. Then I was born a bushman and the bush calls. I like it in the woods and I'm keen about the detective game ——" He stopped and went on in a thoughtful voice: "The strange thing is, when Jimmy went over the rocks, Stannard went after him. Snow and stones were coming down, but he stayed with the kid."

"That was when it looked as if Miss Stannard would marry your pal!" said Neilson meaningly. "Well, I wouldn't bother about the police. *Watch out for Stannard*——"

Somebody knocked at the door and Neilson, getting up, came back with a parcel.

"Your clothes," he said.

Deering put on the clothes and packed up Jardine's to be thrown into the harbour. For a few days he stopped at the hotel, and then Neilson admitted that his inquiries about Douglas had not carried him far.

"We know where he is and he's very sick, but

that's all," he said. "The police mean to use him and he can't be got at."

"Then, I'll start for the woods," said Deering. "The trouble is to hit the proper line. It's possible the police are willing to leave me alone, but I mustn't help them get on to Jimmy."

In the morning he started for New Westminster, although this was not the line to the mountains. At Westminster he vanished in the meadows along the Fraser, and after a time turned north into the woods. In order to rejoin Jimmy, he must follow the great river gorge, and at Mission he risked getting on board the cars. Nobody bothered him, and at length he laboured one evening up the rugged valley in which was the shack. He had bought a skin coat and carried a heavy pack, but he was not warm. The sky was dark and threatening, the ground was hard, and a bitter wind shook the tops of the stiff pines. Deering thought snow was coming and pushed on as fast as possible, until he saw a beam of light.

A big fire threw a cheerful glow about the shack and Jimmy occupied a pile of branches by the snapping logs. He had pulled a blanket over his shoulders, but when he heard Deering's step he jumped up. Deering dropped his load, straightened his back and looked about.

"Where's the Indian?"

"He's gone," said Jimmy. "I expect he had enough. In fact, I'd begun to feel I'd had enough, and when I heard your step my relief was pretty keen."

"Oh, well," said Deering. "Let's get supper and then we'll talk."

When he had satisfied his appetite he narrated his adventures and his meeting Laura and Dillon.

"If you want Frank, he's your man and he might be useful," he remarked. "Then I reckon Miss Laura's willing for him to help. Your friends are good."

"That is so," said Jimmy, looking at Deering hard. "My friends are better than I deserve. But what about Douglas? Did you find out much?"

Deering admitted that he did not, but when he talked about Neilson he used some caution. Since Jimmy trusted Stannard, there was no use in trying to warn him; some time he would get enlightenment."

"On the whole, I think the police knew I was at Vancouver," he said. "Their plan was to hit my trail when I started back. I don't expect they did so, but it's possible. Anyhow, now the Indian's gone, and a cold snap threatens, we have got to quit. My plan's to start for your ranch."

"The ranch is not far from the railroad."

"Its being near the track has some advantages. Since the police searched the spot, I guess they're satisfied. Then we want food, and packing supplies for a long distance is a strenuous job. The Indian could move a useful load, but to carry fifty-pounds across rocks and fallen trees makes me tired."

"A rifle, a blanket, and twenty pounds is my load," said Jimmy and resumed in a thoughtful voice: "Yet I started for the plains——"

Deering used some control and let Jimmy's remark go.

"You could not have made it," he said quietly. "But what about our jumping off?"

"We'll talk about it again," Jimmy replied. "I suppose we must go, but now you're back, I don't want to bother. You brace me up. Until I heard your step, I felt down and out."

He threw fresh wood on the fire, and soon afterwards they went to sleep. Jimmy's sleep was broken, and when he woke at daybreak he shivered. He did not want to get up, but he must fetch water. The kettle handle stung his skin, the pools on the creek were frozen, and he saw the snow had moved five or six hundred feet down the rocks. Rose-pink light touched the high peaks and hoar frost sparkled on the pines, but the stern beauty of the wilds was daunting. Jimmy wanted the deep valleys up which the soft Chinook blew.

When he went back, Deering was occupied at the fire. He looked up and remarked with a twinkle: "The cold is pretty fierce. If we're going to stop, you'll want a skin coat and another blanket."

"When we have got breakfast we'll start for the ranch," Jimmy replied.

XXIII

MARGERET TAKES A PLUNGE

FOR a time Jimmy was not disturbed at the ranch. On the high rocks the frost was keen, but in the deep valley a gentle wind from the Pacific melted the snow. Jimmy durst not order sawn lumber, but Jardine got him a door and windows and the house was warm. Sometimes he went shooting and sometimes he went to Kelshope. Jardine was friendly, but when the rancher had gone to look after his stock Jimmy was resigned. To sit by the fire and talk to Margaret was a delightful occupation.

At the beginning he had remarked her beauty, but now he knew beauty was not all her charm. Margaret was clever; she saw his point of view, and when she did not agree her argument was logical and keen. Then she was proud and fearless, and he sensed in her something primitive. Margaret was his sort and sprang from stock like his. Yet he felt her physical charm. Her eyes were sea-blue, and in the firelight her hair was like red California gold. She had a bushman's balance, and her unconscious pose was Greek. Although she was frank, with something of a great lady's frankness, Jimmy soon knew her fastidious.

But for his part in the shooting accident, his satisfaction would have been complete. It looked as if the police had resolved to leave him alone, and Deering had made one or two excursions to the cities, but Jimmy doubted. He knew the Royal North-West do not forget. Moreover, somebody shot Douglas, and on the whole he thought he had done so. Sometimes he doubted whether he ought to go to Kelshope, but all the same he went.

When Deering was at Calgary, Margaret one afternoon rode home from the station as fast as possible. At the ranch she took down the load of groceries but left the horse tied to a post. Jardine was by the fire and had pulled off his boot. In the morning he had cut his foot with his axe. He gave Margaret a keen glance and saw she had ridden fast.

"Weel?" he said. "Is something bothering ye?"

"Two troopers and their horses came in on the freight train. I expect they're looking for Mr. Leyland."

"Ah," said Jardine. "Somebody has given the lad away."

"Bob," said Margaret and her eyes sparkled.

Jardine knitted his brows. "Maybe, but I dinna ken; Bob hasna been around for long. Did the troopers saddle up?"

"When I left, they were cinching on their camp truck. I thought they'd soon start. Mr. Leyland can't come down the valley and Deering's not with him. Where is he to go?"

" If he could make Green Lake, Peter would put him on the Mission trail."

" He cannot make Green Lake," Margaret rejoined. " He doesn't know the bench country and must start in the dark."

" Jimmy must start soon. If he stops, the troopers will get him," Jardine agreed, and pointed to his cut foot. " Somebody must warn the lad, but I canna gang."

Margaret tried to brace up, for she had not reckoned on her father's lameness. The strange thing was, Jardine had walked some distance to round up his cattle. She must, however, weigh this again. Speed was important and Jimmy was her friend ; in fact, she had begun to think him her lover.

" You could ride the cayuse and carry the packs. If Mr. Leyland was not loaded he could make a good pace."

" The cayuse wouldna carry a weight like mine across the bench belt and Green Lake's a two-days' hike. I canna walk ; I doubt if I could get on my boot," Jardine replied, and added with philosophical resignation : " It's a pity o' the lad ! I expect the police are noo on the ranch trail, but I dinna see how we can help."

Margaret clenched her hands. Somebody must warn Jimmy and her father declared he could not. She looked at him hard and knew he could not be moved. He gave her an apologetic glance and began to fill his pipe, as if the thing was done with. Yet it was not done with. Margaret saw, rather vaguely because she refused to think about it, all

her going to warn Jimmy implied, since if her help was to be useful, she must go with him to Green Lake. For a few moments she hesitated, but she was generous and her pluck was good. Then she turned to Jardine, who had begun to smoke.

"The police shall not get Mr. Leyland. I will go."

"Verra weel," said Jardine. "If ye mean to gang, ye had better start. Ye'll need to take some food; I'll get the saddle bag."

He crossed the floor and Margaret remarked that for a few steps he went lightly, as if his foot did not hurt. Then he limped, and when he got to the door he stopped and leaned against the post. All the same, it was not important and Margaret began to pack some food and clothes. Ten minutes afterwards, she untied the horse and gave Jardine her hand.

"Good-bye," she said in a quiet voice. "I don't know when I shall get back."

Jardine held the stirrup, she seized the bridle, set her mouth and started the horse. When she vanished in the woods Jardine went back to the house, rested his foot on a chair, and knitted his brows. He saw he ran some risk, but he knew his daughter and thought he knew Jimmy. Jimmy was a white man; Jardine, so to speak, bet all he had got on that.

Some time afterwards, Jimmy, cooking his supper, heard a horse's feet and went to the door. He smiled, because he thought he knew the horse; but Margaret was obviously riding fast and snapping branches indicated that she had cut out a

bend of the trail. When she got down her colour was high and the horse's coat was white.

"Roll up your blanket and put the sling on your rifle," she said. "Then I'll help you pack some food."

Jimmy studied her with surprise. Her look was resolute, but he got a hint of embarrassment. Then he saw a light.

"Ah!" he said. "The police are on my track?"

"Two troopers are riding up the valley. They may stop at Kelshope for a few minutes. Where do you keep your groceries!"

Jimmy opened a box, and Margaret picked out a number of articles. "Now make a pack, because you must start at once for my cousin's at Green Lake. I expect Peter will help you south."

"But I don't know the trail, and it will soon be dark."

"Make your pack! The police will arrive in a few minutes," Margaret rejoined impatiently and turned her head. "There is not a trail. I am going with you."

"No!" said Jimmy with some embarrassment. "You're kind, of course, but you ought to see—— If you start me off, I expect I can find my way."

Margaret turned and fronted him. The blood came to her skin and her look was strained.

"You can't find the way and I can't go back. The police know I'm not at the ranch, and if I start for home, I'll meet them in the valley. But we mustn't talk. We must get off."

Jimmy leaned against the table and frowned. Although his heart beat, he hesitated. He knew

Margaret's pluck and he loved her, but she must not pay for her rash generosity. One must think for the girl one loved.

"Suppose the police do know you warned me? It's awkward, but perhaps that's all. Anyhow, I'll go down and meet them. Since I expect I shot warden Douglas, I must bear the consequences."

"Oh, but you are obstinate!" Margaret exclaimed and used Stannard's argument. "It looks as if one of your party meant to shoot Douglas and the police have not caught the man. They must catch somebody and they'll try to fix the shooting on you. To join the chain-gang would be horrible."

"The thing has not much charm," Jimmy agreed and was rather surprised by his coolness, but he was cool. "I don't know much about the police code, but I rather think they'd stop at——"

He heard a noise and Margaret turned.

"I put up the rails," she said in a sharp voice.

Jimmy went to the window and saw a mounted policeman pull down the slip-rails at the fence and ride through the gap. Then he heard a quick step and looked round. Margaret had got his rifle. The butt was at her shoulder and the barrel rested against the doorpost. Jimmy saw her face in profile; her mouth was set tight, her glance was fixed and hard. He jumped for the door, but struck a chair and the collision stopped him. The rifle jerked and a little smoke floated about the girl.

When Jimmy reached the door he saw the policeman's horse stumble. The trooper leaned back, tried to pull his foot from the stirrup, and fell with the animal. Jimmy thought it rolled on him, but

after a few moments he crawled away from its hoofs. The horse was quiet and the man got up. His movements were awkward and he looked dully at the house.

Margaret pushed Jimmy back and put the rifle to her shoulder. A sharp report rolled across the clearing, twigs fell from a quivering pine branch, and the trooper vanished in the woods. Jimmy's hands shook, but his relief was keen.

"I expect his rifle's in the bucket under the horse and the horse is dead," Margaret remarked. "I was forced to shoot."

"Ah!" said Jimmy hoarsely. "I thought you had hit the man!"

Margaret's pose was stiff, as if she braced herself, but she smiled.

"He knows I shoot straight. Until his partner comes and helps him get his rifle, he'll stop in the woods."

"But perheps the other's not far off."

"He's at the ranch," said Margaret. "He'd stop to see if you were about and try to find out something from father. Father would keep him as long as possible——" She stopped and turning her head resumed: "But the first fellow knows a woman shot his horse. When I put up the rifle, he was riding for the door."

"I expect that is so," said Jimmy. "After all, you must go to your cousin's. Let's start!"

Margaret said nothing. When Jimmy brought her horse she got up and he ran by her stirrup. For a time she went up the valley, and then turning back obliquely through thin timber, pushed up a

steep hill. Near the top she stopped and Jimmy got his breath and looked down across the trees. Dusk was falling and all was very quiet. Gloom had invaded the clearing, but he saw a small dark object he knew was the policeman's horse. A thin plume of smoke went up from his house; his fire was burning, and he wondered when it would burn again. For a few moments he was moved by a strange melancholy, and then his heart beat.

"I hate to go away. If you were not with me, I think I'd stop and risk all," he said. "I was happy at the ranch; in fact, I soon began to see I hadn't known real happiness before. At the beginning I was puzzled, but now I can account for it. You were at Kelshope——"

"Not long since you didn't want me to go with you," Margaret remarked.

"Oh, well," said Jimmy with some awkwardness, "you hadn't yet shot the policeman's horse."

Margaret said nothing and he seized the bridle, pulled round the cayuse, and forced her to look down.

"Will you marry me at the Mission, Margaret?"

She met his glance and hers was proud. "I think not, Jimmy. You are a white man and mean to take the proper line. But I will not marry you because I stopped the trooper."

Jimmy threw back his head and she liked his frank, scornful laugh. "Now, you're altogether ridiculous! Your stopping the fellow does not account for my wanting to marry you. Soon after I got to work at the ranch I knew I loved you, but I went to the mountains with Stannard and the

trouble began. So long as the police were hunting for me I durst not urge you."

"But now you do urge me? It looks as if your scruples had vanished!"

Jimmy let go the bridle and bent his head. "I suppose it does look like that. All the same, I love you."

Margaret leaned down and touched him gently. "You keep your rules and your rules are good. Perhaps it's strange, but I think a woman will break conventions where a man will not. Still, you see, I'm proud——"

"You are very hard," Jimmy rejoined. "Yet you ran some risk to warn me. I know your pluck, but if you had not loved me, I think you'd have stopped at Kelshope."

"We'll let it go," said Margaret in a quiet voice. "There's another thing; ranching is a game for you, but it's my proper work. Yours is at the cotton mill. You're rich and your wife must be clever and cultivated."

"I haven't known a girl with talents, grace and beauty like yours," Jimmy declared. "Then I'm not rich yet, the police are on my track, and I may soon be a prisoner——" He looked up and added in a dreary voice: "I admit it's not much of an argument for your marrying me."

Margaret smiled. "Perhaps you were not logical, but we'll talk about it again, when we get to Green Lake. You mustn't talk now. I don't know if the trooper would stop long at the ranch, and we must cross the hill before the moon is up."

She started her horse and they pushed on. An

hour afterwards the moon rose from behind a broken range, and silver light touched the stiff dark pines. The high peaks sparkled; a glacier glimmered in the rocks, and the mists curling up from the valley were faintly luminous. Jimmy smelt sweet resinous smells and heard a distant river throb. The landscape was strangely beautiful, but its beauty was austere. All was keen, and cold, and bracing, and Jimmy, walking by Margaret's bridle, thought her charm was the charm of the stern and quiet North.

XXIV

JIMMY RESIGNS HIMSELF

THE morning was calm and Jimmy, walking by Margaret's horse, turned his head. Faint, sweet notes stole across the rocks and he knew the distant chime of cow-bells. As a rule, the elfin music moved him. Where the cow-bells rang, cornfields and orchards advanced up the valleys and man drove back the forest, but Jimmy's satisfaction was blunted. For two days Margaret and he had pushed through the quiet woods. In the cold evenings they had talked by the snapping fire, but now the romantic journey was near its end.

After a few minutes Margaret stopped the horse. In front, dark pines rolled up the hill and the long rows of ragged tops looked like the waves of an advancing tide that broke against the rocks. Across the valley, the sun touched the snow, and at the bottom of a broken slope a lake sparkled. Jimmy saw its surface rippled, for a Chinook wind blew and the frost was gone. Near the end of the lake a plume of smoke streaked the trees.

"Green Lake ranch!" said Margaret.

For a few moments Jimmy was quiet. When they reached the valley he thought the strange

charm he had felt in the mountains would vanish; it was too fine and elusive for him to recapture. Until they started for Green Lake, he had not known Margaret. Cleverer than he at woodcraft, she had a man's strength and pluck. She did not grumble; she was frank and not embarrassed. Yet a womanly gentleness marked her, and she did not think for herself. Although her touch was light, Jimmy had felt her control and took the line she meant him to take. In the meantime they were not lovers, but partners in romantic adventure.

"For your sake, I'm glad we'll soon reach your cousin's house," he said. "I don't know if I'm glad for mine."

Margaret smiled but gently shook her head. "You must play up, Jimmy!"

"I have played up. Perhaps it's strange, but in the woods to be content because we were pals was not hard. Now we'll soon reach your cousin's, I'm not content, and one is forced to think——"

"For a time you must think about beating the police; that's all," said Margaret firmly.

"It is not all," Jimmy declared. "When we went up the hill in the evening, I asked you to marry me and you promised——"

"I promised we would talk about it," said Margaret. "Before you start from Peter's we will do so; but since you must start soon, we'll go on."

Jimmy saw he could not move her, and they went down the hill. At the ranch fence a man met them and took them to the house. When they went in a woman got up, kissed Margaret, and gave Jimmy a smile. So far as he could see, Mrs.

Jardine and her husband did not think it strange he had arrived with Margaret, and he was somewhat comforted, although he noted that Margaret's colour rose. Margaret knew her relations. They were primitive, honest folk, and took it for granted Jimmy was her lover.

"Sit right down. Dinner will soon be ready," said Peter Jardine. "How's the old man? Give us your news."

Jimmy narrated his and Margaret's adventures and, until he stopped, his hosts said nothing. It did not look as if they were disturbed, but they were bush folk and the bush is quiet. For all that, Jimmy felt they owned themselves Margaret's relations and for her sake were willing to help him out.

"The trapper's old shack is the spot for you," Peter remarked. "After dinner we'll start. Margaret must stop with us."

Margaret agreed, but Jimmy objected.

"Margaret is going with me to the Mission. The police will soon arrive."

"I reckon they don't know her, and they don't know how many womenfolk I've got. When she puts on Sadie's clothes, she'll look as if she belonged to the ranch. Maybe the police haven't found your trail; but we mustn't bet on that."

Margaret went off with Sadie and Jimmy speculated about their talk. By and by he turned to his host.

"I'm going to marry your cousin when she is willing."

"Sure," said Peter. "You reckoned to get married at the Mission?"

"That is true. So far, Margaret refuses."

Peter knitted his brows. "Sometimes I don't see what Sadie gets after and I sure can't calculate Margaret's notion. Women beat me. All the same, it's plain she thinks you a white man, and Margaret's not a fool. Now we'll let it go. Say, did you plug the warden?"

"It looks like that," Jimmy replied. "However, if I did hit the fellow, I didn't know I was shooting at a man."

"Very well! You can't get down the main track to the coast, because the police will reckon on your going there and watch the stations. I'd make for the plains and then shove south for Montana."

"That was Stannard's plan."

Peter smiled scornfully. "You were to cross the rocks and carry your grub and camping truck? Shucks! An old-time prospector might make it; you could not. You've got to lie up at the trapper's shack until we look about. Maybe we can fix it to ship you out of the mountains on board a construction train that sometimes runs down to a station on the Calgary side. Well, let's make our packs and catch the horse."

They got to work and after the horse was caught Peter turned back to the house, but Jimmy stopped.

"I must talk to Margaret for a few minutes," he said.

Margaret came out to him. Her look was quiet but he knew her resolute.

"When dinner's over, Peter and I must start,"

he said. "You refused to go to the Mission. I want to know what this implies."

Margaret gave him a level glance. "Isn't it plain, Jimmy? You know my father, and now you have met my relations. They are not your sort."

"So far as I know, they're a remarkably good sort," Jimmy rejoined. "Besides, in a way, I am their sort. My grandfather was a mill hand; my father borrowed a small sum, and started with cheap machinery to spin cotton at a little old-fashioned mill. He was frugal and laborious; in fact, he prospered because he had your bushman's qualities. I have loafed and squandered, but after a time I felt I'd had enough and began to see I'd inherited something from the people who made Leyland's go. Then, if we must talk about our relations, you don't know my uncle Dick. Well, I've stated something like this before, but it's my reply to your argument."

"But you mean to go back to Lancashire, and when you marry your wife ought——"

"To begin with, I doubt if the police will allow me to go back. Then, if I can't get you, I don't want a wife!"

"Yet, not very long since, it looked as if you might be satisfied with Miss Stannard."

The blood came to Jimmy's skin, and to conquer his embarrassment was hard.

"I don't think you're kind. Well, I'm young and, until I met Stannard, I was very raw. All I knew was the cotton mill, and I expect Laura carried me away. But I was not altogether a fool;

Laura Stannard is a charming girl. The obstacle was, she saw I was not the man for her. Then I did not know you."

Margaret smiled, but her smile was gentle. "Perhaps I was not kind. You're stanch and my experiment was shabby."

"Your remark was justified. Anyhow, it's not important. If I can cheat the police and get back to Lancashire, will you marry me, Margaret?"

For a few moments Margaret was quiet. Then she said in a steady voice: "Your cheating the police would not persuade me; in fact, somehow I think they will find out you are not accountable for the shooting accident. The obstacle's not there. You are young, Jimmy, and you admitted you were carried away."

"One cannot carry you away," Jimmy rejoined.

"I must think for you and for myself," said Margaret and Jimmy's heart beat, because he saw her calm was forced. "Suppose your trustees did not approve your marrying a girl from the bush?"

"Dick Leyland might not approve; his habit's to be nasty, but mine's not to bother about Dick. Sir Jim is head of the house and he's human. I can't picture his not being altogether satisfied with you."

"But you don't know!"

Jimmy pondered. Margaret's firmness baffled him, but, from her point of view, he saw she took the proper line. All the same, it cost her something; she was highly strung, her colour came and went, and her tight mouth was significant. The trouble

was, he durst not urge her very hard. In the meantime, he must hide from the police and might be sent to the chain-gang.

"I want you, my dear," he said. "I'm selfish. If you marry me, I run no risk, but you may run some. My drawbacks are rather numerous, particularly just now."

"Very well," said Margaret. "When you come back from the mountains, I may perhaps agree. But your relations must approve and I don't yet engage——"

Jimmy advanced, but she stepped back and stopped him. Then he turned and saw Mrs. Jardine wave to them from the stoop.

Dinner was a melancholy function, and Jimmy thought his hosts were disturbed. They were Margaret's relations and for her sake were willing to help, but he pictured Mrs. Jardine's weighing the risk. Then he was bothered about Margaret, for Peter's confidence that his wife could bluff the police if they arrived before he returned did not banish his doubts.

At length Mrs. Jardine got up and Peter and Jimmy went to load the horse. By and by the rancher ran back for some tobacco and Jimmy moodily fastened the pack-rope. Stooping by the horse, he thought he heard a step, but did not look up, and a few moments afterwards he felt a hand on his shoulder. Then an arm went round his neck and Margaret turned his head and kissed him. He tried to seize her, but she slipped away and stopped a yard or two off. Jimmy thrilled and his eyes sparkled.

"Now I know when I come back you won't refuse me."

"You don't know; I don't know," Margaret replied in a trembling voice. "All the same, I love you, and you're going away——"

Peter and Mrs. Jardine came out. The rancher seized the bridle and called to the horse. Jimmy lifted his battered hat and they started across the clearing.

Three days afterwards, they stopped at a small stone hut, built against the bottom of a great rock. On one side dark pines rolled up to the walls, and a hundred yards off one could hardly see the pile of stones was a building. Yet the small room was rudely furnished and the earth floor was dry. They cut some wood, made a fire, and cooked food, and after the meal lighted their pipes.

"You have got an axe and a rifle, but if you run out of grub, Graham, the section-hand on the railroad, will put me wise," said Peter. "Tom's a white man and his post's not far from the spot we crossed the line. The trapper who lived here is dead and I reckon nobody but Tom and me knows about the shack."

"I expect I've got all I want, but I'm bothered about Margaret."

"You don't want to bother. In the meantime, Margaret's my wife's sister from Calgary. That's good enough for the police, and anyhow the Royal North-West aren't city patrolmen. They reckon they're highbrow frontier cavalry and I guess the trooper won't allow a girl held him up. You'll

stay put, until we see if we can ship you out with the construction boys to the Calgary side. If that plan won't go, we'll push across the range for the big park valley and try to run you south. I think that'll all ; but if you want to send a letter to your friends, Graham will mail it for you."

After a time Peter knocked out his pipe and Jimmy went with him to the door. When the rancher vanished in the woods and all was quiet Jimmy leaned against the post and gave himself to gloomy thought.

It began to get dark. The snow-veined rocks melted in the mist and the pines were vague and black. In the distance a timber wolf howled and the long mournful note emphasized the dreariness. In the rocks where Jimmy hid at the beginning he had Deering's society and at the ranch he had Margaret's and Jardine's. Now he was altogether alone in the savage wilds. Going back to the fire, he threw on fresh wood, and although he was not keen about smoking, lighted his pipe.

XXV

THE CALL

JIMMY fastened his skin coat, and going to the door of the section-man's hut, looked up the track. The railroad and an angry river occupied the bottom of the gorge, but the water was low and a rapid throbbed on a dull note. Jimmy knew its slack beat was ominous; the frost had stopped the streams that not long since leaped out from the glaciers.

He shivered, for the cold was keen and the coat he had got at Green Lake was old. Besides, he was tired; he had started before daybreak from his shack, but when he reached the railroad the moon was on the rocks. In the shadow, the snow that streaked the mountain-side was blue; across the gorge broken crags shone like polished steel and the small pines growing in the cracks sparkled with frost. Not far off, a dark hole in a slanted white bank indicated the mouth of a snow shed, but Jimmy knew the stones and snow had come down the hill.

When he looked up, his view on one side was cut by the top of a precipice; it was like looking up from a deep pit. Farther along the gorge,

the rocks got indistinct and melted in the moon's pale reflections. No track but the railroad pierced the mountains, although the wide chain was broken by narrow valleys running north and south. Jimmy had come up the line from the valley he occupied, and by another some distance off one could reach Green Lake. The nearest station was twelve miles away, at the end of Graham's section.

Jimmy had arrived half an hour since, but had not found Graham, although his stove was burning. Peter Jardine had stated he could trust the man, who had begun to clear a ranch at Green Lake but had stopped when his money was gone. In the mountains, ranching is a slow and laborious job, and men whose means are small are forced at times to follow another occupation.

By and by a lantern twinkled at the mouth of the snow shed and a man came up the track.

"Hallo!" he said, "I've got some news and wondered if you'd blow in, but I wanted to take a look at the rock-cut before the freight comes through. Did you make supper?"

Jimmy said he had cooked some flapjacks, although he felt he ought to wait until his host arrived.

"Shucks!" remarked Graham. "Jardine's my neighbour and he allows you're his friend. But the cold's fierce. Let's get in."

They sat down by the stove and for a minute or two Jimmy was content to warm himself and smoke. At the shack he had no light but the fire and the long evenings were dreary. All the

same, he was disturbed and with something of an effort he said, "Well?"

"Two troopers got off the west-bound at the depôt and my partner, Tellson, allowed they brought a lot of truck. Looks as if they meant to stop around and search the neighbourhood."

"Ah!" said Jimmy, "I expect they're on my track! Did they bring their horses?"

"Tellson saw no horses. If the boys were going to Green Lake, they could ride. Besides, the other outfit went there not long since."

Jimmy nodded. He knew the police had not bothered Margaret and he must think for himself. The troopers not bringing their horses was ominous, since it indicated that they were going to push into the mountains. The valley in which he hid did not open to the track; to reach it one must climb a mountain spur, but he imagined the police meant to climb. If they found the mouth of the valley, they might reach the shack before he knew, and if he got away, he must take the snowy rocks.

"I expect Jardine hasn't yet arranged to send me out on board a train?" he said.

"Peter was trying to fix it; he'd got to wait until he met a construction boss he knows; but he can't fix it now. The police will stop the gangs and tally up the boys."

"If they come down the line, to get on my track won't take them long."

"Your chances don't look very good," Graham agreed. "If you could cross the range to the park valley, you might get away south, but I doubt if you could make it."

Jimmy said nothing. He imagined Deering stated the range had been climbed by some city members of the Canadian Alpine Club; but they, no doubt, took packers to carry supplies and went when the snow-line was high. For a lonely man to venture on the icy rocks was ridiculous. After a few minutes Graham pulled out his watch.

"The freight's making good time and when she's gone I must go up the track to the piece the boys underpinned," he said. "I reckon I'll be away an hour and you had better go to bed."

Jimmy heard a rumble and went with Graham to the door. To watch the great train come down the gorge would for a few minutes banish his gloomy thoughts. Up the track, a streak of silver light touched the rocks and trees. The speeding beam got brighter, and by and by dazzling radiance flooded the gorge. The ground began to shake, harsh, clanging echoes rolled across the rocks; one heard the big cars jolt and the roar of wheels. Then black smoke swirled about the hut and the beam was gone. In the dark, the banging cars rushed by, a blaze touched the snow shed and went out, and the turmoil died away.

Graham picked up his lantern and Jimmy went back to the stove. Lighting his pipe, he pulled out Stannard's map and began to ponder. It was obvious he must not stop long at the trapper's shack. Since the police watched the neighbourhood, he could not get food, and when they found the way to the valley he would be driven back into the mountains. In fact, he felt he ought to try for freedom now before his line of retreat was cut,

but he was tired and did not see where he could go.

There was no use in stealing off along the track, because the station agents were, no doubt, warned to look out for him. If he started before daybreak, he might perhaps reach the trail to Green Lake, but Peter had already run some risk for him and Margaret was at her cousin's. To go to Green Lake would put the police on her track.

Jimmy studied Stannard's map. Across the mountains behind the shack, the park valley ran south-east, and from its other end one could perhaps reach the plains and the United States. Graham had stated Jimmy could not cross the range, but Graham was not a mountaineer. Stannard was a mountaineer and could get supplies and packers. Then Stannard was his friend and perhaps owed him something.

The adventure was daunting, but Jimmy resolved to try it. He must for a few days risk stopping at the shack, and pulling out his pocket-book, he wrote a note. Graham would send the note and Stannard would, no doubt, start soon after it arrived. Then Jimmy thought he ought to let Margaret know his plans and he wrote another note. Putting the envelopes on a shelf, he got into Graham's bunk.

When Jimmy's note arrived at the hotel Stannard was at dinner. For the most part, the guests had gone, but Mrs. Dillon had returned with Frank and Laura, and a young man had joined the party. Stevens belonged to the Canadian Alpine Club, and knowing about Stannard's exploits, had cultivated his society.

Stannard took the soiled envelope from the page and noted it had not a stamp.

"Who brought the letter?" he asked.

"A freight brakesman gave it our porter at the station."

Stannard put down the envelope and resumed his dinner, but Laura said, "The hand is Jimmy's. Aren't you curious?"

"I am curious, anyhow," Dillon declared and Mrs. Dillon looked up, for she knew something about Jimmy's adventures.

"If you want to read your letter, do so," she said to Stannard.

Stannard opened the envelope and Laura remarked his thoughtful look. She took the note from him and after a moment or two gave it to Dillon.

"Is it possible for Jimmy to get across?" Dillon asked.

"I frankly don't know," said Stannard and turned to Stevens. "A young friend of ours wants to try a rather bold exploit; he thinks he can cross the Cedar Range and I could help. In summer, I wouldn't hesitate. To venture on the snow-fields now is another thing."

Stevens's eyes sparkled. He was young and enthusiastic, and to climb with a mountaineer like Stannard was something to talk about.

"Although I haven't long joined the club, sir, I went with Gordon when he explored the Cascades from Rawden. If you go, I'd like to join you."

"I don't yet know if I'll go or not," said Stannard and resumed his dinner.

Mrs. Dillon touched Laura. She was a large and rather quiet lady and not marked by much refinement, but she was kind and sometimes firm.

"I want to see that note," she said.

Laura looked at Stannard and gave her the note.

"The poor young man. He's surely up against it!" she exclaimed. "I like Jimmy. If I was a mountain clubman, I'd feel I'd got a call."

Stannard said nothing and Laura was quiet. She was disturbed about Jimmy, but she knew her father. Besides, she thought Stevens curious. By and by she looked at Dillon, who began to talk about something else.

When dinner was over Mrs. Dillon joined another lady and Stannard went off. Laura and Dillon stopped at the table and Stevens saw they did not want his society. He went away and Laura asked: "Do you think Jimmy runs much risk?"

"If he stops at his hut, I expect the police will get him," Dillon replied.

Laura frowned and looked about. The table was decorated by flowers from the coast, and the electric light was reflected by good china and glass. In the background were polished hardwood panels and carved pillars. The spacious room was warm; all struck a note of luxurious refinement, but Laura thought about Jimmy, cut off from his supplies, in the snow.

Had Jimmy gone back to Lancashire, she admitted she might have married him. He had refused and for a time his obstinacy had hurt, but she was not revengeful and, since she had rather weighed his advantages than loved him, she could let it go.

She liked Jimmy and was moved by a gentle sentimental tenderness.

"Are you willing to help Jimmy, Frank?" she asked.

"Why, of course! I thought you knew I'm anxious to help," Dillon declared. "Perhaps I was jealous of Jimmy, but now I'm sorry for him. All the same, your father puzzles me. He's not keen."

"I expect he knows the risk," said Laura thoughtfully, for Stannard's hesitation was obvious. "Since he must lead the party, he feels he ought not to be rash. Then if Jimmy got away across the mountains, I expect the police would make you all accountable."

"Oh, well, the job is awkward, although I expect we could put it over. Suppose we look for Mr. Stannard?"

Stannard was in the rotunda, and when Laura and Dillon advanced he smiled.

"You are young and romantic, but I am not. When one gets old one uses caution."

"I doubt if I am romantic, but I think Mrs. Dillon did not exaggerate," Laura rejoined. "Jimmy is our friend and trusts us. His note is a call."

"Sometimes deafness is not a drawback. I own I'd sooner not hear the call."

"But you mean to go?"

"It looks as if I might be forced. Frank's resolve is rather obvious," said Stannard with a resigned shrug.

Dillon gave him a keen glance. Somehow he felt Stannard did mean to go, but wanted to be forced. Frank thought it strange.

"I feel we ought to help, and now Deering is not about, nobody but you can lead us."

For a few moments Stannard was quiet. Then he said, "Very well, but if we are going, we must start soon. We want packers to carry food and a tent as far as possible, and I'd like a good mountaineer to help on the rocks. The hotel guides are gone, but I expect the clerk knows where to find them."

"Grant lives at Calgary."

"I think the fellow I want's at Revelstoke and he could get the train that arrives in the morning," said Stannard, and pulled out his watch. "We can send a night-letter and needn't use economy. I'll telephone the station agent and give him the message."

Frank knew Grant of Calgary was a good mountaineer, but he said nothing and Stannard gave Laura a smile.

"I expect you are satisfied."

"You're as noble as I thought," said Laura. "I knew why you hesitated and it wasn't for yourself. But I knew you would go."

XXVI

DEERING TAKES THE TRAIL

STANNARD was marked by a superficial languidness. Strangers thought him careless and his humorous tranquillity had charm. For all that, when speed was important he moved fast and after he telephoned to the station he got to work. He packed rucksacks for his companions, got ropes and ice-axes, and arranged with the hotel cook to put up a supply of food. Then he sent a messenger for two or three half-breeds who carried loads for fishing parties. Stevens helped and admitted that Stannard knew his job. All he did was carefully thought about.

After some time Dillon joined them and Stannard said, "It's awkward, but Willmer at Revelstoke is engaged. However, he states he can send us a useful man and we are to meet him at the station. He'll come by the train in the morning and we'll get on board. We ought to reach the railroad hut Jimmy talks about by dark and if the night is clear we'll push on."

"If the police are about the station where we get off, they may stop us."

"It's possible," Stannard agreed. "Still they

don't know our object and we must persuade them we are mountaineering tourists. Boast about your climbing and the Canadian Alpine Club; Stevens knows their exploits. All the same, I imagine the police are in the mountains. Well, your sack is packed, and when you have got your snow-spectacles and the grease for your skin, we'll stop for a smoke."

In the morning the half-breed packers arrived and soon afterwards all were ready to start. The hotel servants and three or four guests came to see them go, but when the others strapped on their loads Stannard joined Laura on the steps.

"Well, we are going to Jimmy's help," he said with a smile. "Frank is very keen, but as far as possible I'll try to see he does nothing rash. To know your marriage is fixed is some comfort."

Laura looked up quickly. Although Stannard's smile was kind, she was vaguely disturbed.

"When Frank wanted the wedding soon I thought you agreed rather easily. I was satisfied to stop with you for some time."

"Oh, well," said Stannard. "I'm afraid I haven't carried out my duties. I'm a careless fellow and feel my daughter does not owe me much. Although you have grown up beautiful and attractive, Nature and your aunts are accountable. Then, you see, I'm getting old, and mountaineering is my hobby. Sometimes one slips on an icy rock——"

"You mustn't talk like that; it hurts," said Laura with a touch of emotion. "You gave me all I asked for; you have always indulged me.

Then I urged you to go, and now I feel I ought not to have. To be generous in my way costs one nothing. I shall not venture on the rocks; I send you."

Stannard laughed, but Laura, studying him, was moved. Her father was handsome and wore the stamp of high cultivation. Although he was not young, he carried himself like an athlete. She knew his strength and pluck and his gentleness to her. Now she thought him fine and chivalrous.

"You follow your heart," he said and kissed her. Then he pulled out his watch. "But I must not be selfish and Frank is waiting."

Dillon advanced and Stannard resumed: "Youth is romantic and sometimes exaggerates. Laura imagines her generosity and yours accounts for my starting on our adventure. Well, perhaps I'm slow and cautious, but now and then one recaptures a touch of one's boyish rashness. However, I mustn't philosophize. We must get off in a few minutes."

"I'll join you on the trail," said Dillon, who remarked that Stannard implied that he had hesitated to go. Stannard had said something like that before, as if he wanted others to note that the plan was not his. All the same, it was not important, and Dillon took Laura's hand.

Five minutes afterwards the party started. The packers carried the heavy loads, the others the ice-axes, and Stevens and Stannard wore round their shoulders coils of Alpine rope. Where the trail turned they stopped for a moment and waved their hats, and then vanished in the trees.

Some time afterwards Laura saw a plume of black smoke roll across the pines and stole off to her room. She did not want Mrs. Dillon's comfort. Her father and her lover had started for the rocks, and if they paid for their rashness, she was accountable.

In the morning she got a jar, for a sergeant of the Royal North-West Police arrived at the hotel. He was polite but firm, and Laura saw she must brace up. Mrs. Dillon had gone with her to the rotunda and to know she had her help was some comfort.

"Mr. Stannard started for the mountains yesterday," the sergeant remarked. "He took a quantity of camp truck and two of your friends. Where did he go?"

"I don't altogether know his line," Laura replied. "When you climb high mountains you cannot make fixed plans. Much depends on the snow."

"Well, I expect Mr. Stannard stated where he meant to start?"

"Why, of course," said Mrs. Dillon. "He'd get off at the Green River depôt."

The sergeant remarked her frankness, but thought she saw some frankness was called for, because for him to find out where the party had got off was not hard.

"Do you know Mr. Stannard's object? Our clubmen go for the rocks in summer. His starting now was strange."

Laura lifted her head and her look was proud. She thought she could play up and the fellow must not imagine Stannard had gone to Jimmy's help.

"My father is not a Canadian clubman. He's a famous Alpine mountaineer and can go where others cannot."

"Our boys are pretty smart," said the sergeant, smiling. "But are all Mr. Stannard's party expert mountaineers? Mr. Stevens, for example? And Mr. Frank Dillon?"

"My son," said Mrs. Dillon, who saw the other had talked to the hotel clerk. "Frank knows something about the rocks and belongs to a club that explores the Olympian range. We're Americans."

The sergeant bowed politely, but she resumed: "Mr. Stannard's English, all the lot are tourists and I sure can't see what the Canadian police have to do with their going off to climb your rocks. You're not going to draw strangers to the country if you bother them like that."

"Sometimes the police's duty is awkward," said the sergeant in an apologetic voice.

"The police have not much grounds to inquire about my father's excursion," Laura remarked haughtily. "When he killed the big-horn he did not know he poached on a game reserve, but he paid the fine and it is done with."

The sergeant saw her eyes sparkled and she was not playing a part. She did not know all he knew, and he must not enlighten her.

"Not long since Mr. Stannard went shooting with the pit-light, which is not allowed, and the game-warden was shot."

"My father did not shoot the warden; he stopped and helped the police."

"Three of his party pulled out," the sergeant rejoined. "Maybe Mr. Leyland could put us wise about the shooting and we reckoned Mr. Stannard knows where he is."

"Then you must wait for his return. If you found his track, I don't suppose you could follow him on the rocks."

"In the meantime, you're resolved not to help us hit his track?"

"I don't know his track," Laura replied.

The sergeant went off. He had talked to the hotel clerk, and although he had not found out much from Laura, he had found out something. The girl was persuaded Stannard had gone to help Leyland, and the sergeant thought his plan really was to help the young fellow get away. In fact, the sergeant thought he saw Stannard's object for doing so.

Laura, however, was disturbed. She was anxious for Jimmy and knew the risks Stannard ran in the mountains, but she imagined she had baffled the sergeant and she resigned herself to wait for news.

When the next train for the coast rolled across the pass Deering was on board a first-class car. He was dressed like a city sportsman, but his clothes were thick and his shooting jacket was lined with sheepskin, for Deering knew the wilds. When he went to Vancouver his movements interested the police, but at Calgary they left him alone, and nothing indicated that they now bothered where he went. Deering thought it strange, unless they knew something he did not.

In the meantime, he was occupied by another

subject. Although he meant to see Jimmy out, he had frankly no use for hiding much longer at the ranch. Jimmy must be smuggled across the boundary to the United States and Deering weighed a plan.

When he got down at the station he meant to push on for Jardine's, but Kelshope was some distance off and he resolved to stop at the hotel. He had been for some time at Calgary and Stannard would perhaps know if Jimmy was all right. The clerk sent for Laura and by and by she came down. She gave Deering a cold glance, but he had long known her antagonism.

"You cannot see my father. He and Frank are in the mountains," she said.

Deering knitted his brows. When winter had begun one did not start for the rocks for nothing.

"It looks as if the police have found out Jimmy was at his ranch."

"Then, Jimmy was at the ranch? We didn't know; he did not come to see us. I expect you stopped him!"

"You don't trust me, Miss Laura. Still Jimmy's coming to the hotel had some obvious drawbacks."

"I did not think you a proper friend for Jimmy and Frank."

Deering smiled. He knew he was a better friend of Jimmy's than Stannard, but he said, "Oh, well; perhaps it's not important. Anyhow, Jimmy trusts me, and I mustn't let him down. You imply he's not at the ranch?"

Laura told him about Jimmy's note, and he

inquired about Stannard's plans. When she had satisfied his curiosity his look was thoughtful.

"Stannard will send back the packers at the bottom of the rocks," he remarked. "Has he got a guide?"

"He could not engage the guide he wanted. Another man about whom I don't think he knew much was sent."

"Well," said Deering, "your father needs a useful man. Jimmy's steady on an awkward pitch, but sometimes he's rash. The others are raw boys. It looks as if I had got to hit the trail."

"Frank is not a boy, and my father is a famous climber," Laura rejoined. "If he cannot cross the mountains, do you think it's possible for you? Then you ought to have started before. The police have followed Jimmy for some time and I think another party set off yesterday."

Deering thought to embarrass him gave her some satisfaction, but he smiled.

"I know you're not my friend, Miss Laura, and I must try to be resigned. All the same, unless you put me wise, it may be awkward for Jimmy. What about the last lot of police?"

She told him and he bowed. "Thank you! I'll get off."

"But the sergeant is in front of you and there is not a train."

"The police are pretty smart, but I've known them bluffed," Deering remarked. "Then the station agent and another fellow talked about a construction train's going up the line. I've travelled on board a calaboose before."

Laura hesitated, and then gave him her hand. "After all, I think you are Jimmy's friend, and if you engage to leave Frank alone——"

"I rather think you don't know your power," Deering rejoined with a twinkle. "Frank is well guarded from all my wiles. In fact, I'm willing to give you best."

"Oh, well," said Laura, "perhaps I was not just."

He went off and Laura mused. She had not liked Deering. He was a gambler and exploited the extravagance of rich young men. Yet Frank trusted the fellow and she began to doubt if her antagonism were altogether warranted. For one thing, Deering was stanch, and his pluck was rather fine. Her father had started with a well-equipped party; Deering went alone, and when he got to Green Lake must baffle the police. Then she liked his humorous politeness. He knew she doubted him, but he was not revengeful. On the whole, she thought when she gave him her hand she took the proper line.

XXVII

DEERING'S PROGRESS

SOON after Deering started from the hotel he met Jardine. Deering knew the shrewd Canadian Scots and thought the rancher a man to trust. Moreover he had not yet got all the light he wanted. Jardine was on foot and Deering said, "Hallo! It's a long hike to Kelshope. Where's your horse?"

"Margaret's got the cayuse at Green Lake. D'ye no' ken?"

"I didn't know," said Deering. "But you're coming from the station. When do they expect the construction train?"

"She stopped doon the track for the boys to fix some rails. The operator was grumbling because she'd no' get through till dark and he'd got to block the line for the Kamloops freight."

"Oh, well," said Deering, "since I want to get on board the calaboose, perhaps her stopping in the dark is not a drawback. But what about Miss Margaret's going to Green Lake?"

Jardine looked at him rather hard. "I alloo yer're Mr. Leyland's friend?"

"Sure thing!" said Deering. "Jimmy reckons

you his friend. Well, I want to know how he got away."

Jardine told him and Deering pondered. He had undertaken an awkward job, and since he saw some obstacles, he resolved to give the rancher his confidence. Among the trees the frost was not keen and the sun was on the road. Deering indicated a spruce log and pulled out some cigars.

"Suppose we take a smoke and talk," he said, and when Jardine lighted a cigar resumed: "Won't Miss Margaret's shooting the fellow's horse make trouble for her?"

"I reckon not," said Jardine, who had heard the trooper's statement, and when he got a note from Margaret remarked that the narratives did not agree. "I'm thinking the boys dinna mean to pit it on Margaret and the trooper's no' altogether prood."

"It's possible. But why didn't *you* put Jimmy wise?"

"I'd cut my foot chopping, a day or two before."

Deering rather doubted if Jardine's cutting his foot accounted for all, but he said, "Let's talk straight! I suppose Miss Margaret is going to marry Leyland?"

"Maybe, but I dinna ken. Jimmy wanted to marry her."

"Very well," said Deering. "I'll tell you all I know."

He narrated his interview with Laura and Stannard's going to Jimmy's help. Jardine's look got thoughtful and sometimes he frowned. When Deering stopped he said, "Ye dinna trust Stannard!

Ye'd sooner Jimmy hadna gone across the rocks wi' him ? "

" I would sooner he had not," Deering agreed. " Jimmy trusts Stannard, the others are tenderfoots, and I understand they have not a first-class guide."

" The man they've got is no' a mountain guide ava ; Gillane's a packer on the Government surveys. But I dinna see much light yet. Jimmy owes Stannard a guid sum."

" Leyland insured his life in Stannard's favour and Stannard wants money. Well, I'm going up the line with the construction gang to follow the party's trail."

Jardine got up and his look was very grim. " Just that ! I'll join ye."

" Not at all," said Deering. " Your part's to go to Green River depôt afterwards and watch out. I expect you're a good bushman, but this is a job for a first-class mountaineer. Besides, you cut your foot ! "

Jardine gave him a keen glance, but Deering resumed. " You see, I must hit up the pace and can't boost you along. Can I hire a young man, a prospector if possible, at Green River ? "

The other's arguments did not move him and by and by Jardine resigned himself to stop.

" I'm thinking my nephew, Peter, is the man ye want. Whiles he goes to the depôt for his groceries and mail. The storekeeper will ken if he's aboot. Ye can tell Peter I sent ye to him."

After a few minutes Deering went off, but he went slowly and did not keep the road to the station.

Joining the line two or three miles down the valley, he found a track-grader's tool hut and went in and smoked. The hut was cold, but Deering's skin coat was thick and good. When dusk began to fall he walked along the track and stopped three or four hundred yards from the station.

By and by a light twinkled like a star in the gloom of the woods. A steady throb rolled up the valley, and by and by Deering distinguished a locomotive's measured snorts and the rumble of wheels. The star was now a dazzling moon, and its reflections picked out, far in advance, glittering rails and frost-spangled trees. When the locomotive was level with Deering he began to run up the line, and soon after the train stopped he got behind the last car.

He knew the company's rules, but he knew something about train-gangs, and he had got ready a few dollar bills. Although the station agent did not see him get on board, when the train rolled up the track he occupied a box in front of the calaboose stove. The men gave him supper, and when he had drained a can of strong coffee he pulled out some cards and showed how an expert puzzled his antagonists.

Cold draughts swept the rocking calaboose, the stove roared, and one smelt locomotive smoke. Laboured snorts echoed in the rocks, couplings rang, and when the train sped scross a bridge the roll of wheels drowned Deering's voice. Deering smiled and waited for the noise to stop. He had undertaken a daunting job and was bothered about Jimmy, but in the meantime he owed something

to his hosts and he played up. Although Deering had some drawbacks, his rule was to play up.

A number of the men had long studied cards and could bluff on a poor hand. Three or four won regularly some part of their companions' wages, but they knew a master's touch and for a time Deering held the group. Then he lighted his pipe and began to talk about something else. He found out that the train ran between a gravel pit and Green River. The men were filling up a trestle and cutting out an awkward curve.

"Have they got a hotel at the settlement?" Deering inquired.

"They've no use for a hotel at Green River. Sometimes a rancher comes in for his mail and a survey party jumps off. I guess that's all. You can stop at the post office. The man who keeps it runs a small store."

"Nothing much doing yet," Deering remarked. "Do the mounted policemen come to the settlement?"

A big shovel-man laughed. "They're getting busy around Green River. Two lots came in not long since and a trooper's there now, but he won't bother you. Looks as if his job was to watch out for somebody who wanted to *get on* the train."

"Then, you reckon they're after somebody in the rocks?" said Deering carelessly.

"That's so," another agreed. "I wouldn't bet much on the fellow's chance! When we ran up with the last load, a police outfit was starting for the range. Three or four troopers and a pack-horse. They'd loaded up some truck."

"Oh, well," said Deering. "The Royal North-West are smart boys, but I've known them beat. However, I've been for some time on the road and think I'll go to bed. Can somebody give me a bunk?"

They gave him a bunk, and for an hour or two he slept; he knew it might be long before he slept warm again. When he awoke the locomotive bell was tolling and the roll of wheels was getting slack. The calaboose was very cold, and, Deering jumping from his bunk, went to the open door.

In front a fire burned by a water tank and the beam from the headlamp flickered across a small clearing and touched a wooden house. Farther off, a big blast-lamp threw up a pillar of flame. The light tossed and for a few moments all was shadowy. Then the strong illumination leaped up again, and Deering saw a man who carried a short rifle walk along the line. He knew the Royal North-West uniform.

Deering picked up his fur coat and hesitated. In the mountains one must wear proper clothes and the coat was good, but unless he could cheat the trooper he might not reach the mountains. He touched the man who had given him the bunk.

"I'll trade my coat and cap for yours."

The fellow's skin coat and cap were old, and he looked at Deering with surprise.

"Why do you want to trade? A track-grader doesn't buy Revillon furs."

Deering pointed to the trooper. "The policeman might calculate something like that, but I expect

he knows you belong to the gang. You are going to dump some rails and for half an hour I want a job."

"Now I get you!" said the other.

He pulled off his shabby coat, and when the train stopped and Deering jumped down nothing distinguished him from the construction gang. Climbing on to a flat car, he joined the men who threw down the rails, and presently saw the trooper stop the fellow who wore his coat and cap. He did not know how the railroad man accounted for his wearing good furs, but he was obviously a track-grader and after a few moments the trooper let him go. Then the train rolled up the line and Deering stopped with the men who moved the rails.

By and by the trooper walked past the gang, glanced at the men carelessly, and turning back, vanished in the gloom. Deering thought him satisfied nobody but the track-graders was about, and soon afterwards he started for the house. So far, he had trusted his luck, but he wanted help and must get food, and must not excite the storekeeper's curiosity.

A clump of pines cut the illumination up the track. Sometimes when the blast-lamp's flame leaped up, bright reflections touched the house, but for the most part, the ground in front was dark. When Deering was near the door, a man came out and stopped for a few moments. Deering thought him a rancher and when he went down the steps met him at the bottom.

"Can I buy some flour and groceries?" he asked.

"You might," said the other and looked at Deering as if he thought the inquiry strange. "Why do you want groceries? Where are you going?"

Deering saw something must be risked and when a risk must be run he did not hesitate.

"If I can find the trail, I'm going up the valley. Peter Jardine has a ranch at the lake, I think?"

"That's so," said the other. "I'm Peter Jardine!"

Deering laughed. His luck had not turned and when the reflections from the blast-lamp touched the rancher's face he thought he had got the proper man.

"Then, as soon as you can get me some groceries, I'll start for the rocks. Your uncle sent me along and stated you would help. You see, I'm Jimmy Leyland's partner and Miss Margaret's friend."

"Ah," said Peter, "you're Deering? Well, the police are after Jimmy. For some days two troopers hunted for his tracks and then a sergeant and another came in on the train and started off as if they knew where he was. In the meantime, a sports outfit hit the trail, but I didn't meet up with them. I made the station in the afternoon and didn't know what I ought to do. In fact, when you came along, I was wondering if I'd pull out for the ranch."

"You're coming with me. I don't want to boast, but I'm a mountain clubman and on the rocks I reckon I can beat the police."

"But Jimmy's friends got off in front of the troopers."

"There's the trouble; they're not all his friends," Deering rejoined. "On the whole, I'd sooner the police got him than he crossed the range with the other lot. But we'll talk about this again. When can you start?"

"I can start as soon as my horse is loaded up, but we have got to bluff the policeman. He mustn't see us take the mountain trail. Well, I've pork and flour and groceries. Have you got all you want?"

"I want a Hudson's Bay blanket and a pack-rope," said Deering and gave Peter a roll of bills. "Then you had better buy a fry-pan and grub-hoe."

"Very well. Go ahead up the trail across the clearing and wait for me by the creek," said Peter and returned to the store.

After a time he rejoined Deering and tied his loaded horse to a branch.

"The storekeeper knows I hit the Green Lake trail, and we don't want the cayuse. When we have sorted out the truck we need, he'll make the ranch all right. Light the lantern and we'll fix our packs."

Deering lighted the lantern and after a few minutes strapped a bag of food on his back. He pushed his folded blanket through the straps, gave Peter the rope, and picked up the grub-hoe, a Canadian digging tool very like a mountaineer's ice-axe. Then they put out the light, let the horse go, and went back quietly to the railroad. Nobody was about,

and stealing across the line, they plunged into the gloom.

"My luck's good," said Deering. "I sure want it good. We're up against a big awkward job."

XXVIII

A DISSOLVING PICTURE

AFTER a time Deering stopped and looked about. The stones on the river bank were large and sharp, the night was dark, and his load embarrassed him. In the distance, he saw a small red fire ; a dim light marked the post office, and the reflections from the blast-lamp quivered behind the trees. Deering got his breath and braced up.

Born in the bush, he had known poverty and stern physical toil. He was a good mountaineer, but he admitted that his two hundred pounds was something of a load to carry across icy rocks. Then he had, for the most part, lived extravagantly at fashionable hotels, and his big muscles were soft ; but this was not all. The distant lights stood for human society and civilization. Deering was very human and fought against an atavistic shrinking from the dark and loneliness. Moreover, he knew the wilds. For all that, he meant to conquer his shrinking.

He admitted that he was perhaps a romantic sentimentalist and his adventure did not harmonize with his occupation. Sometimes, however, one was

not logical and not long since he would have plunged down the rocks but for Jimmy's pluck. Besides, he saw Stannard had used him to entangle the lad. Deering had his rude code, but Stannard had none. He was cold and calculating, and Deering thought he meant to carry out the plan he tried before when he sent Jimmy over the neck. Although Deering did not like the job, he meant to baffle him.

In the meantime, all was quiet but for the turmoil of the river a few yards off. Dark pines occupied the narrow level belt by the track, and on the other side vague blurred rocks went up. Thin mist drifted about, and the line, running downhill, melted into the gloom. The trooper was at the station and Deering imagined nobody was about.

"The stones are sharp and slippery," he said. "We'll take the track and push on for the section-hut."

They got on the line, but did not progress fast. The gravel ballast was large and hurt their feet; the ties were not evenly spaced. Sometimes Deering stepped on the timber and sometimes on the loose stones. Then numerous ravines pierced the rocks, and although the construction gangs had begun to fill up the chasms, for the most part wooden trestles spanned the gaps. To cross an open-work trestle in the dark is awkward, and when Deering balanced on a narrow tie and looked for the next, he sweated and breathed hard. On one trestle he stopped. Sixty feet below him, he saw the foam of an angry torrent; the next tie was some distance off, and the wood sparkled with frost.

In a sense, his adventure was ridiculous. When

he used the railroad he went on board a first-class car and checked his baggage. Now he stumbled over the ballast and carried on his back all he could not go without. In the meantime, however, he must cross the trestle, and he trusted his luck and jumped.

He got across and after three or four hours they reached the section-shack. Graham was in bed, but he got up and told them all they wanted to know. Three policemen with an Indian and a pack-horse had come down the track and Graham inferred they had found the entrance to Jimmy's valley. He reckoned they would send back the Indian and the horse when they took the rocks, but the fellow had not yet returned. Peter was puzzled about the Indian.

"They didn't hire him up at the station," he remarked. "Looks as if they'd fixed it for him to meet them."

"It looks as if they'd made their plans and their plans were pretty good," said Deering. "However, since they've got a loaded horse, they can't shove on fast. How long was the other outfit in front?"

Graham told him and for a few moments Deering pondered. Then he said, "It's awkward! Stannard knows where Jimmy is, and he'll hit up the pace. I reckon the police don't know and must look for his tracks. If we hustle, we'll run up against the gang."

The difficulty was obvious and Peter frowned.

"We might get by their camp in the dark. We'd see the fire."

"I doubt," Deering rejoined. "If the boys make

a fire, they'll make it where the light is hid. They don't want to put Jimmy wise."

" Well ? " said Peter. " What is your plan ? "

Deering laughed, a noisy laugh, for now he had started, his hesitation vanished.

" We'll trust our luck and shove ahead. In the morning we'll get up the rocks and look about. I've brought my glasses. Let's get going."

Graham gave them directions and when they climbed a steep hill they found the valley. The ground was broken and in places covered by tangled brush, but they made progress and at daybreak laboured across the snow to the top of a spur. Deering sat on his pack and used his prismatic glasses.

Grey cloud floated about the mountain slopes, but the high peaks were sharp and began to shine in the rising sun. Some were rose-pink and some were yellow ; the hollows between their broken tops were grey and blue. A map of the mountains occupied a wall of the hotel rotunda, and Deering, using his glasses, adjudged it roughly accurate.

" I expect the blue gap is the head of the valley," he remarked and when Peter nodded resumed : " We'll allow Stannard joined Jimmy ahead of the police and took him along. We have got to hit their line and the job is not as hard as it looks. They can't steer for the shoulder of the big peak ; the rocks won't go and I see an ugly ice-fall on the glacier. I reckon I'd head back, obliquely, for the *col,* up the long *arrête.*"

" I don't use no *habitant* French," Peter observed.

" Oh, well. Our clubmen have begun to use the

tourists' talk," said Deering and gave Peter the glasses. " Anyway, you see the ridge that runs up to the neck ? "

Peter studied the ridge. He had hunted mountain sheep and imagined sun and frost had worn the rocks to something like a knife-edge. In places, sharp pinnacles broke the top, and he thought it significant that for the most part the snow did not lie. The shadow behind the top, no doubt, marked a great precipitous gulf, but the farther end of the ridge touched a white hollow between two peaks. If one could get across, one might find a glacier going down the other side.

" I reckon your friends couldn't make it between sun-up and dark," he said. " Anyhow, the police would see them on the rocks."

" Stannard might hit a line a few yards below the top, but I imagine the clouds will soon roll up. Give me the glasses. I want to locate a gully that goes for some distance up the ridge."

Peter saw his object. The long ridge ran back obliquely from farther up the valley and to get up by the line Deering studied would cut out the corner. Moreover Peter imagined the police had reached Jimmy's hut, and if they found the tracks of Stannard's party, they would climb the ridge from the other end. In consequence, Deering's going up the gully would put him in front.

" I guess we'll start. When we noon we'll be nearer, and if the mist's not thick, you can look for the line you want."

They went down the hill, and by and by the cloud rolled up the slope, and rocks and peaks were

lost in gloom. Then Deering began to get tired, for although there was no snow at the bottom of the valley, the ground was rough. After an hour or two he pushed into the timber and stopped.

"Perhaps it's risky, but I've got to eat and take a rest," he said. "The trees are pretty thick, and if the smoke goes up, the hill's a good background."

They cooked some food and then sat by the fire. Not far off the belt of trees was broken, and presently Deering saw the cloud had got thin and begun to roll back, up the mountains. Vague rocks pierced the vapour and grew distinct; the mist trailed away from battered trees and slanted fields of snow. For a time it clung about the high dark precipices, and then one saw the snow-packed gullies seam the crags like marble veins. A faint light pierced the vapour, and the broken top of the ridge began to cut the background.

Deering pulled out his glasses and went to the opening in the wood. The light was getting stronger, but he did not think the cloud would altogether melt and he must search the rocks while search was possible. By and by a beam touched the ridge and the snow glimmered like pale gold against blue shadow. Above the shadow were broken peaks, but the belt of dark blue indicated a gap and Deering, noting the strong colour, thought the gap profound.

The landscape, lighted by the unsteady beam, was strangely beautiful. The pale illumination did not travel far and the rocks outside its reach owed something of their mysterious grandeur to the contrast. Deering, however, was not romantic and

thought he saw a line, across a steep, white slope and up a buttress, to the ridge. If he could get up, he would cut Stannard's track and reckoned he would not be much behind the party.

He concentrated on the ridge. The slope along the top was not even but went up, rather like a terraced walk. Rocky buttresses supported the terraces, and, for the most part, the stones were free from snow; Deering knew this indicated a very steep pitch. One buttress was marked by a broad white band, and when he rubbed the glasses he thought he saw on the snow a small object he had not remarked before. The object moved, and signing Peter, he gave him the glasses.

"What's that? A cinnamon?"

"The bears have come down," said Peter. "The big-horn have gone for the low benches. I guess the thing's a man."

Deering agreed and waited. Perhaps it was strange, but of all the animals, civilized man alone was willing to front the cold on the daunting heights. The ridge, outlined against a vague background of majestic peaks, looked as remote as another world. To imagine flesh and blood could reach it was hard, but Deering meant to try and knew Stannard's calculating steadiness. If one went carefully, studying the obstacles, and using the axe and rope——

"It's a man all right. I see another," said Jardine and gave Deering the glasses. Deering saw three men. They advanced very slowly, and he pictured their cutting steps before they moved. One crossed the snow-belt and vanished. When he was anchored in the rocks he would steady his

companions. Deering knew it was Stannard, for Stannard would not trust a poor guide at a spot like that. The others, perhaps, were Dillon and Stevens. Then he saw two more; Gillane, the packer, and Jimmy. Anyhow, Stannard had started with three companions and now he had four. Deering knew all he wanted to know.

He watched the party, strung out at even distances, move across the white band; and then the figures melted. They had not reached the other side, but when he rubbed his glasses they were gone. The peaks in the background vanished, the ridge got indistinct, and the black pines on the lower snow-fields faded, as if a curtain were drawn across the picture.

Deering shut his glasses and went for his pack. The mist was not thick and he knew his line to the buttress.

"Put out the fire and let's get off," he said.

"You can't cross the ridge in the dark and the cold's going to be fierce," Peter remarked.

"That is so. I doubt if Stannard can make the neck, but if he gets there, he must wait for morning. Maybe we'll find a hole in the rocks."

Peter said nothing. He had engaged to go where the other went and must try to make good, although the road was daunting. In thick timber, a bushman can front biting cold; but on the high, icy rocks one could not make camp and light a fire. If their luck were very good, they might find a hole behind a stone, in which they must wait for daybreak and try not to freeze.

He put out the fire and when they went through

the wood pondered gloomily. To reach the neck would cost them much; but to get there was not all. They must get down on the other side, and, for the most part, the mountain tops were tremendous precipices. Peter rather thought the neck opened on a glacier, but sometimes a glacier is broken by awkward ice-falls.

All the same, Peter set his mouth and pushed ahead. In the valley, he could hit up the pace for Deering, but he imagined to follow the big fellow on the rocks was another thing. When a bushman took the rocks he went to shoot big-horn and bear. The mountain clubmen studied climbing as one studies the ball-game.

XXIX

HELD UP

A FEW pale stars were in the sky and the moon was over a vague, grey peak. Deering shivered, beat his numbed hands, and looked about. The frost was keen and he had not thought he could sleep, but when he looked about before the stars were bright and the moon was not above the peak. In front, the buttress cut the sky, and although the rocks were indistinct, he saw the belt of snow Stannard had crossed. Since Stannard had got his party up the buttress, Deering argued he could get up; but the rocks were awkward.

Deering wore the railroad man's skin coat and a thick Hudson's Bay blanket. For climbing their weight was an embarrassment, but he would sooner carry the load than freeze. Although he lay with his shoulders against Jardine, he was numb, and the outside of the blanket sparkled with frost. A tilted slab partly covered them, but the gravel in the hole was frozen and Deering's hip-joint hurt. The worst trouble was, when he was very cold his brain got dull and he hated to use effort. Yet effort was needed, for day had begun to break and he must cross the neck by dark. To stop another

night on the high rocks was unthinkable and he knew his luck might turn. If thick snow fell or a strong wind blew, he and Peter would stop on the rocks for good.

Moreover, Jimmy was in front, and Deering thought Jimmy ran a daunting risk. He ought to get up and start, but he shrank from the frost, and for a minute or two he weighed his grounds for doubting Stannard. Jimmy owed Stannard a large sum and had insured his life. If he went over a precipice, the company would pay Stannard. Deering admitted the argument looked ridiculous; Stannard was highly cultivated, rather extravagant than greedy, and not at all the man to plan a revolting crime. Yet he had not engaged a proper guide and his companions were trustful young fellows whom he could mislead. Moreover, he had gone down into a snow-swept gully to help Leyland and knew this would weigh. Stannard had then expected Jimmy to marry Laura.

Deering pushed Peter, who woke up and grumbled. Deering opened his pack awkwardly and pulled out a bannock and some canned meat.

"Day is breaking. When you have got your breakfast we must start."

"Unless I get a hot drink, I've not much use for breakfast," Peter replied. "When do you reckon we'll get down to the timber? When I camp I like a fire."

"Depends on our luck," said Deering, drily. "I doubt if you'll make a fire to-night."

"If I wasn't a fool, I'd go right back. Stannard's

most a day's hike ahead. Then if the police have hit his trail, they're not far behind us."

"We cut out some ground and on the rocks two men go faster than five. Stannard must find a line for his gang and us. Then I expect he'll be held up for a time at the neck. I don't know where the police are."

Peter ate the bannock and put on his pack. "Well, let's get going!"

The light was not yet good. Their muscles were stiff, physical fatigue reacted on their nervous strength, and at the belt of snow they stopped. The belt was perhaps ten yards across and occupied a channel in the rocks. The surface was smooth and hard, and Deering imagined if one slipped one would not stop until one reached the valley. A row of small holes, however, indicated that Stannard's party had gone across and up the dark, forbidding buttress on the other side. Deering frankly shrank from the labour and risk of crossing, but he durst not turn back.

"Where the boys have gone we mustn't stop," he said. "Tie on the rope and give me the grub-hoe."

Peter gave him the hoe. The blade was curved, like a carpenter's adze, and at its head was a short pick. The tool, although rather heavy, was a good ice-axe. In soft snow, one can kick holes, but the snow was hard and Deering doubted if the notches Stannard had cut would carry him. He used the pick, balancing in a hole while he chipped out the next, and when they got across he sent Peter in front. Their hands were numb and

where the snow had melted veins of ice filled the cracks in the rocks. The hold was bad and Peter stopped at the bottom of a slab Deering had remarked when he sent him in front.

"I sure don't know how we're going to get up."

"Stannard got up," said Deering and looked about.

Thirty feet below him the belt of snow pierced the rocks. It looked nearly perpendicular and the snow-field at its foot was horribly steep. In the shadow, the surface was grey and dark patches marked where rocks pushed through. A very long way down, across a sharp but broken line, the colour was blue, and Deering thought the line the top of a precipice. He turned and looked up. The slab was upright and about ten feet high; he could not see a crack or knob, but he noted two or three fresh scratches.

"Lean against the rock and spread your arms," he said, and when Peter did so climbed up his back.

Standing on the other's shoulders, he could reach the top of the slab. The top was nearly flat and went back for some distance, but the snow was hard. Deering durst not trust his numbed hands and he tried the pick. The blade got hold, but he could not see farther than the handle. If he had caught a small lump of ice that would not support him, the rope would pull Jardine off the rock. All the same, something must be risked.

"Brace up good," he said and trusted the pick. The tool held and he got his chest on the top, but now the blade was near his body, his reach

was short and when he used his hand his stiff fingers slipped across the snow. It was obvious he must move the pick, but the tool was his main support and the effort to push it forward might send him down. Still, if he could get three or four inches higher, he might, perhaps, balance on the edge.

His boots got no grip on the smooth slab, but when he used his knee his clothes stuck to the stone. When his waist was nearly level with the top he pulled out the pick and moved it forward. For a moment or two the blade came back and he began to go down; then it held and after a stern effort he was up. The rock above the ledge was broken, and throwing the rope across a knob, he helped Peter.

Half an hour afterwards, they reached the ridge behind the buttress. Deering's hands were bleeding and he was not cold. His skin was wet and he breathed by laboured gasps. In front, the ridge went up, unevenly, to the neck. The narrow, broken top, for the most part, was supported by precipitous rocks. One must use caution and could not go fast, but after a time a snow cornice began on one side. The top, levelled by the wind, was smooth, and, so far as it rested on the stone, was firm. As a rule, a snow cornice is widest above, and Deering knew if he crossed the line where it overhung its base he might break through, but the marks in front indicated where Stannard had gone.

Stannard knew much about snow cornices and Deering wondered whether he could not have found some grounds for throwing off the rope and letting

Jimmy venture on the dangerous overhang. He had obviously not done so; moreover he had brought his companions up the buttress. If Deering himself had meant to let somebody fall, he thought he would have tried at the awkward slab. In fact, he admitted that to picture Stannard's weighing a plan like that was theatrically extravagant. Yet he knew Stannard, who was not the man people thought. He was very clever and if he plotted to get rid of Jimmy, he would not do so soon after he had taken him into the mountains. He would wait until he had nearly carried out his job and was bringing his party down from the rocks. Anyhow, Deering's business was to overtake the party. To wonder whether he exaggerated Jimmy's danger would not help.

For a time he made good progress along the cornice, and in the afternoon he reached the neck. At the end of the ridge Stannard's tracks forked. One row of footmarks crossed a steep snow-bank running up a peak; the other went along the hollow neck.

"All the outfit went up the neck and then two or three turned back," Peter remarked after studying the trampled snow.

Deering nodded. "Stannard sent them back and pushed ahead with Gillane to look for a line down the other side. When we get across we'll see what he was up against."

At the end of the neck they stopped and Deering frowned. He had been longer than he thought and a pale illumination behind a peak indicated that the sun was low. In the valley below, he saw a frozen

lake and a dark, winding band he knew was timber on a river bank. He had food, and if he could reach the trees he need not bother about the frost. A Canadian grub-hoe, made for cutting roots, is a useful tool, and he could build a wall of bark and branches, light a fire and brew hot tea. The trouble was, to get down to the friendly pines.

In front of him, a snow-field sloped to a spot at which two uneven, converging rows of dark rocks ought to have met. The rocks were the tops of precipices, but the point of their intersection was cut out, and a glacier began at the gap. Deering could see for a short distance down the glacier, until it plunged across the top of a steeper pitch, and when he used his glasses he noted its surface was crumpled, as if it broke in angry waves. In fact, it was rather like a rapid suddenly frozen at the top of a fall. Deering knew it was an ice-fall and the waves were giant blocks. The rocks at the side were very steep and veined by snow.

"Nothing's doing there!" he remarked. "I don't see Stannard, but he won't find a useful line. Let's look for the boys."

They turned and, following the tracks along the neck, after some time went round a buttress that broke the front of the range. On the other side three people occupied a little hollow in the rock. One got up awkwardly.

"It's Peter!" he shouted. "Why, Deering, you grand old sport!"

Deering gave Jimmy his hand and noted that his look was strained and his face was pinched.

"Miss Laura put me on your track and Mr.

Jardine wanted to come along," he said and studied the others, who did not get up.

"They've had enough," said Jimmy. "We were two nights on the rocks and the cold was keen. Stannard's gone to see if we can get down the glacier, but I don't think he's hopeful. Anyhow, let's go back into our hole. When you wriggle down under a blanket, it's a little warmer than outside."

Deering joined the others. A jambed stone partly covered the hole, and the boys' packs, furcoats and blankets kept them from freezing, but he saw their pluck was nearly gone.

"What about the police?" he asked, when he had lighted his pipe.

"We don't know where they are," Jimmy replied. "Stannard brought us up the ridge, but from my shack you see another way up at the head of the valley. I went over to study the ground and thought the climb harder than it looks. All the same, I imagine the police have tried it. Of course, when they got to the snow they wouldn't find our tracks, but they know we're in the mountains——"

"Then, they're south of us?"

Jimmy nodded. "On this side of the range; they'd reckon on our pushing south and expect to cut us off. Now you see why Stannard's keen about getting down the glacier!"

"We can't get down; the ice-fall won't go," said Stevens moodily. "I've been two nights on the rocks and doubt if I could get down a ladder. My notion is, Stannard knows his plan's a forlorn hope and Gillane is badly rattled."

"The fellow's a common packer; Stannard ought not to have hired him," Dillon agreed. "Still we couldn't wait, and when the Revelstoke man sent Gillane we were forced to start. Anyhow, I'd trust Stannard where I wouldn't trust a guide."

"He hasn't hit a useful line yet," Stevens rejoined. "We're held up, and I doubt if we can stand for another night in the frost."

"I'm willing to go back and risk the police," said Jimmy. "Still, we couldn't start until daybreak and would be forced to camp again on the ridge. The valley's not far off; if we can make it."

"We must wait for Stannard's report," said Deering soothingly. "When I was at the hotel the clerk gave me a letter for you."

Jimmy beat his numbed hands and opened the envelope. Then he laughed, a dreary laugh.

"In a way, the thing's a joke! Leyland's has something to do with a Japanese cotton mill and Sir Jim writes from Tokio. He's going to England by Vancouver and sails on board the first C.P.R. boat. He means to stop for a few days and look me up——" Jimmy studied the postmark and resumed: "The letter came by San Francisco; I expect he's at Vancouver now."

"Your luck is certainly bad," Deering remarked in a sympathetic voice.

"Jim's the head of the house; Dick owns him boss," Jimmy went on. "His letter's kind, and if he'd arrived before, when I was making good, I might have got his support. I wanted to persuade him I was not a careless fool; but when he gets to know my recent exploits——"

Deering supposed Jimmy had wanted his uncle to agree about his marrying Margaret. Since Sir James was a sober business man, the lad had not much grounds to hope he would approve his nephew's romantic adventures.

"After all, I rather think we'll cheat the police," he said. "They don't know where we are and when we make the valley we'll hit up the pace. I've friends who'll help you across the frontier and you can sail for England from New York."

"The drawback is, we can't make the valley. Stannard can't lead us down," Stevens interrupted gloomily.

Deering looked up. "We'll know soon. I hear steps."

Stannard came round the corner, saw Deering, and stopped, rather quickly.

"Hallo! We did not expect you. Were you at the hotel? Have you got some news?"

"I was at the hotel," Deering replied. "The morning before I got there a police sergeant arrived. I understand he was curious about your excursion."

Stannard's glance was keen and Deering thought him disturbed.

"You imply the fellow knew I'd gone to join Jimmy?"

"Miss Laura imagined something like that. But what about the glacier?"

Stannard hesitated and knitted his brows. "I think we'll risk it in the morning. You see, if we pushed along the range, we might meet the police. Besides, we must get down to the timber soon."

" You sure can't get down," remarked Gillane, the packer, who had followed Stannard.

" We'll try," said Stannard and turning to the others, forced a smile. " Well, I want some food and Frank might light the spirit lamp. You must brace up for another night on the mountain, but we're lucky because we have got a corner where we shan't freeze."

XXX

THE GULLY

DAY broke drearily. The sky was dark and snow clouds rolled about the peaks. In the hollow behind the rock Stannard's party crowded round the spirit lamp. One could get no warmth, but in the snowy wilds the small blue flame and steaming kettle called. Moreover, each would soon receive a measured draught of strong hot tea.

All were numb and their faces were pinched. Stevens was frankly despondent, and when Dillon broke his hard bannock his stiff hands shook. Gillane was apathetic, but when Stannard measured out the tea he joked and Deering laughed. To laugh cost the big man something, but he knew he must. Stern effort was needed and human effort does not altogether depend on muscular strength. The packer's mood was daunting and it was obvious they would not get much help from him.

Jimmy was quiet. He must concentrate on holding out and could not force a laugh. He admitted he had not pluck like Stannard's. Stannard was indomitable, and now his gay carelessness was very fine. Although he was the oldest of the party and his face was haggard, he joked and

his jokes were good. When the meal was over he got up and beat his hands.

"We must get down before dark and I think I know a line," he said. "If our luck is good, we'll camp in the trees by a splendid fire."

To start was hard, but they got off and the snow was firm. The steep slope below the neck was smooth and for a time they made progress. Jimmy remarked the thickening snow cloud and knew Stannard thought it ominous, for he pushed on as fast as possible. So far, one could use some speed; the obstacles were in front.

The snow-field stopped at the top of a chain of precipices. The rocks were broken by the deep gap through which the glacier went, but Jimmy noted smaller breaks he thought were gullies filled by snow. He could not see the front of the precipices, but he pictured their falling for six or seven hundred feet. At the bottom, no doubt, were steep spurs and long ridges, across which one might reach the trees rolling up from the valley. The precipice was the main obstacle, but Jimmy did not think the rocks were perpendicular. Anyhow, the glacier was not, and if one could cross the ice-falls, it would carry them down. The trouble was, the cloud was getting thick.

After a time, they stopped at the head of the glacier, and Stannard, Jimmy and Deering climbed to a shelf that commanded the ice-fall. Mist rolled about, but for some distance one saw the broad white belt curve down between the rocks. Then Jimmy saw the fall and set his mouth. The snowy ice was piled in tremendous blocks and split

by yawning cracks. It looked as if the cracks went to the bottom, and one imagined others, hidden by fresh snow. Stannard turned to Deering, who shook his head.

"The boys can't make it; I doubt if you can. Nothing's doing!"

"Very well," said Stannard. "I marked a gully about two miles south. I don't know if you'll like it, but we must get down."

Deering pulled out his watch. "You have got to hustle. The boys can't stand for another night on the mountain."

When they rejoined the others, it looked as if his remark was justified. Gillane declared if they could not cross the ice-fall they must stop and freeze; Stevens owned he was exhausted and doubted if he could reach the gully. Jimmy would sooner have risked the fall, since he was persuaded the other line would not carry them down, but if Stannard thought the line might go, he was willing to try it.

They fronted the laborious climb to the snow-field, and soon after they got there mist blew across the slope. The party was now drawn out in a straggling row and by and by Deering stopped and looked about. He knew two or three were behind him, but he saw nobody.

"Where are the boys?" he shouted.

Peter said he had not seen Stevens and Dillon for some time, but they were no doubt pushing along and the party's track was plain.

"I'm going back," said Deering. "Watch out for Jimmy."

He plunged into the mist and presently found Stevens sitting in the snow. Dillon was with the lad and when Deering arrived urged him to get up. Stevens dully refused and said there was no use in the others bothering; he could go no farther. Deering pulled him up and shoved him along.

"You're going to the gully, anyhow," he shouted with a jolly laugh. "When we get you there, you can sit down and slide."

Dillon helped and some time afterwards they came up with Peter.

"Where's Jimmy?" Deering asked in a sharp voice.

"Stannard reckoned he was near the spot he'd marked. He took a rope, and Gillane and Jimmy went along. They allowed I must stop to watch out for you."

"You let Jimmy go!"

"Sure I did," said Peter, with sullen quietness. "I reckon you needn't bother about Jimmy. Something's bitten you. Stannard's all right. If he can't help us, we have got to freeze."

Deering said nothing. Stannard's charm was strong, and cold and fatigue had dulled Peter's brain. There was no use in arguing and he followed the others' track. He could not see much, for the mist was thick. The ground got steeper and rocks pierced the snow. It looked as if he were near the top of the precipice, but so long as the marks in front were plain he need not hesitate. After a few minutes he saw Gillane. The packer leaned against a massy block, round which he had

thrown the rope; the end was over the top of the rocks.

"Hallo!" said Deering. "What's your job?"

"I'm standing by to steady Mr. Stannard. Top of the gully's blocked, and he calculated to get in by a traverse across the front. There's a kind of ledge, but we didn't see a good anchor hold."

Deering remarked that the fellow's grasp was slack and a single turn of the rope was round the stone. If a heavy strain came on the end, he thought the rope would run and Gillane would not have time to throw on another loop. Cold and fatigue had made him careless.

"Get a good hold and stiffen up," said Deering. "I'm going after Stannard."

The rocks were not as steep as he had thought and the ledge was wide enough to carry him, but a yard or two in front it turned a corner. Although the mist was puzzling, Deering thought it melted. In the meantime, he must reach the corner. Sometimes Jimmy was rash, and if Stannard allowed him to run a risk he ought not to run, nobody would know.

When Deering got to the corner, the mist rolled off the mountain top. He saw a tremendous slope of rock, pierced by a narrow white hollow. For four or five hundred feet the gully went down and gradually melted in a fresh wave of mist. Deering noted the sharpness of the pitch and then fixed his glance on Stannard, who leaned back against the rock. Jimmy, holding on by Stannard's shoulder, was trying to get past on the outside of the ledge.

Deering stopped and his heart beat. The others

did not see him and he durst not shout, but if Stannard moved, it was obvious Jimmy would fall. Stannard did not move, and Jimmy, crossing in front of him, stopped and looked down.

"The stretch is awkward and you can't steady me," he said. "Still I think I could reach the slab and slide into the gully. Before we bring the others, perhaps I ought to try."

"You have a longer reach than mine and you are younger," Stannard replied.

Deering could not see the slab, but he imagined Stannard had noted something about it that Jimmy had not. Now Jimmy fronted the other way, Stannard's hand was at his waist and Deering thought he loosed the knot on the rope.

"Hold on, Jimmy," he said in a quiet voice.

Jimmy stopped. Stannard turned, and although his look was cool Deering thought his coolness forced. He leaned against the rock, but Deering saw his hands were occupied behind his back.

"I thought you went for Stevens," he remarked.

"The kid wasn't far back," Deering replied and laughed. "Gillane's rattled and half frozen. I reckon he might let you go, but my two hundred pounds is a pretty good anchor. Slip off the rope and I'll help Jimmy; he won't pull me off."

Stannard awkwardly pulled out the knot, and Deering, who had thought to see the rope fall, was baffled. For all that, he knew Stannard's cleverness and imagined the fellow knew he had experimented.

"I'm going in front of you," he resumed. "Wait

until I tie on, Jimmy. You can't trust the slab."

When he had tied on he braced himself against the rock. Jimmy vanished across the edge and the rope got tight. After a few minutes he came up.

" So far as I can see, we can get down by cutting steps, but I couldn't see very far," he said. " Your tip about the slab was useful, Deering. The top was rotten and a lump came off. I was lucky because I put on the rope."

" On the rocks caution pays," Deering remarked. " Well, let's get up and go for the others. Cutting steps for four or five hundred feet is a pretty long job."

They went back along the ledge, but Deering felt slack and his big hands shook. He had borne some strain and rather thought that had he arrived a few moments later Jimmy, and perhaps Gillane, would have gone down the rocks. Yet he did not know. In fact, he admitted that he might not altogether know.

XXXI

STANNARD'S LINE

A WAVE of mist rolled across the rocks, but the vapour was faintly luminous, as if a light shone through. Deering, Stannard, Jardine and Jimmy waited on the steep bank above the ledge ; Gillane had gone back for the others. When he arrived the party would start.

Deering knew the venture was rash and the labour heavy. They would use two ropes and the leader must kick and cut steps in the snow ; the others behind would then occupy the holes and hold him up until he cut another lot. Cutting steps for four or five hundred feet, however, was a slow job, and when the leader was exhausted to tie on a fresh man might be dangerous. Then nobody knew what was at the bottom and the gully might break off on the front of an icy cliff.

All the same, some rashness was justified. Nothing indicated that the mist would altogether roll away, and in two or three hours it would be dark. If they stopped for another night on the high rocks, all would freeze ; an effort to reach the timber and camp by a fire was, so to speak, their forlorn hope. Besides, Stannard was persuaded

they could get down, and Deering admitted his judgment was good. By and by Stannard gave him a careless glance.

"I'll lead on the first rope and take Gillane and Stevens. Jimmy and the others will go with you."

Deering wondered. He was resolved Jimmy should use his rope, but Stannard's proposing it was significant. If Stannard knew why he had joined them on the ledge, it looked as if he were resigned to let Jimmy go. Then Stannard pulled out his watch.

"We must get off. Shout for Gillane. Your voice carries well."

Deering shouted and fixed his glance on the slope behind the group. After a few minutes, two or three indistinct objects loomed in the mist.

"The boys are coming," he said, and resumed in a puzzled voice: "Gillane went for Stevens and Dillon; but I see *four*."

"There are four," said Jimmy, and Deering's mouth got tight.

He thought the first man did not belong to Stannard's party, and now he saw two others behind the advancing group.

"The police!" said Stannard, and shrugged resignedly.

Jimmy turned. His face was pinched and his pose was slack, but his look was calm.

"You have played up nobly, but we're beaten and I've had enough. In fact, to know I'm beaten is rather a relief."

Deering nodded gloomily. There was no use in trying to get away; the Royal North-West are

empowered to shoot, and, as a rule, shoot straight. He waited and noted mechanically that Stannard was a few yards nearer the top of the rocks. By and by a police sergeant stopped opposite the group.

"We have got you! Don't move until you get my orders," he said, and addressed a trooper, indicating Gillane's party. "Hold that lot off!"

"We are not looking for trouble and haven't got a gun," said Deering. "Go ahead and put your job across."

He turned and glanced at Stannard, who said nothing. The mist was getting thin and Deering thought his look strained. Gillane had stopped behind the police, and the sergeant advanced, pulling at his belt.

"I have a warrant, but my hands are froze and I can't get inside my coat."

"You can show us the warrant again," said Jimmy. "I'm James Leyland, the man you want."

"We *don't want you*," the sergeant replied.

Jimmy's legs shook and he sat down in the snow. After the long strain, his relief was poignant and reacted on his exhausted body. He gave the sergeant a dull, puzzled look.

"Then whom do you want?"

"Harvey Stannard," said the other, and Stannard turned.

His figure cut the misty background and he carried himself as if he were not disturbed. In fact, although the thing looked ridiculous, Jimmy imagined he had expected something like this.

"I am Stannard. Why do you want me?"

"When I can loose my belt I'll read you the

warrant. The charge is killing game-warden Douglas."

"Then Douglas is dead?" said Stannard in a quiet voice.

"He died four or five days since," the sergeant replied.

"Ah!" said Stannard, and braced himself. "Well, I have nothing to state. I reserve my defence——"

"Stop him!" shouted the sergeant, and leaped across the snow.

Stannard stepped back, stumbled on the steep bank and vanished.

For a moment Jimmy, numbed by horror, wondered whether his imagination had cheated him. Then he saw Stannard was really gone and he ran for the ledge. The others joined him, but Stannard was not on the ledge. Two or three hundred feet below a dark object rolled down a long slab and at the bottom plunged into a gulf where the grey mist tossed.

"He's gone," Deering remarked to the sergeant. "Perhaps you'll find him when the snow melts."

They went back to the spot where they had left their packs and ropes. For a time all were quiet, and then the sergeant said to Deering: "He beat me, but I don't get it yet. I didn't reckon on his going over; he stated he reserved his defence."

"Perhaps he was rash," Deering remarked in a thoughtful voice. "In the meantime, however, we must let it go and concentrate on getting down to the bush. How did you find us?"

"We went for a neck behind Mr. Leyland's shack.

When we saw no tracks we pushed along the main range. We reckoned you'd gone by the long ridge and we might cut your trail. We were three nights in the rocks and are all played out"

"Then you had better join us. We are going to try Stannard's line down the gully. I don't engage to make the woods, but I don't see another plan."

The sergeant hesitated. "Stannard hit the line?"

"He declared the line would go," said Deering quietly. "Perhaps you have not much grounds to trust him, but he was a great mountaineer."

Jimmy turned and threw Deering the end of the rope.

"Don't talk!" he said to the sergeant. "If you mean to join us, tie on. We must start."

A few minutes afterwards, they crossed the shelf. Deering led, and Jimmy, going first on the second rope, rather doubted if they would reach the trees. In summer the long straight crack was obviously the mountain's rubbish shoot and its sides were ground smooth by rolling stones; now it was packed by hard, firm snow. To slip would mean a savage *glissade*, and then perhaps a plunge——

Much depended on the leader's nerve. Reaching down, held by the rope, he must chip out holes; and then, when the man behind him occupied the notches, move a foot or two and cut another. Sometimes Deering used his boots and sometimes the ice-pick; but, for the most part, when his party had gone across, the holes were broken and Jimmy was forced to cut.

The labour was exhausting and by and by Deering

owned he had had enough. The trouble was to help him back and put another in his place, but Gillane got into the loop and brought them down some distance. Then he stopped and for a few minutes all lay in the snow. Mist hid the bottom of the gully and none durst hope their labour would be lightened much when they got there. For all they knew, they were painfully crawling down to the top of a precipice. In fact, nobody was willing to brace up for the effort to change the leaders.

After a time Jimmy turned his head. The mist was lifting. It went up in torn shreds and the bottom of the gully began to get distinct. Where the dark trough ran out from the rocks a smooth snowfield went down. The vapour steadily rolled off the slope, until Jimmy saw a vague, dark belt he thought was timber. His heart beat and he got back his pluck.

"Stannard hit the proper line," he said. "We'll pitch camp in the woods."

Dillon took Gillane's post, the sergeant took Jimmy's, and they pushed on. By and by the mist rolled down and hid the pitches below, but, now all knew where they went, the gloom vanished and slack muscles were braced. For all that, when they reached the snowfield Deering looked to the west and frowned.

"The light's going and the trees are a long way off," he said. "Mush along, boys. You have got to get there!"

In places the snow was loose and to get forward was hard. Jimmy pushed Stevens for some distance and they were forced to stop for a young

police trooper. On some pitches the snow was hard and slippery, and rocks with icy tops broke the surface. Dark crept up from the valley and the trees were behind the ground in front. Yet from the daunting gully they had looked down across the vast white slope and the picture that melted like the mist led them on. Ahead were rest and food and warmth. At length, two or three hours after dark, Dillon stumbled and rolled in the snow.

"Watch out for the juniper I ran up against," he shouted. "Keep going! This trail's for the woods!"

Half an hour afterwards Jimmy threw off his pack and leaned against a spruce. The ground was steep and stony, but rows of small trunks cut the glimmering snow. All round was fuel and one could build a shelter and eat hot food. He thrilled and the blood came to his frozen skin. They had run daunting risks and borne all flesh and blood could bear, but the strain was done with. They had made it!

XXXII

BY THE CAMP-FIRE

IN the timber the cold was not very keen and the tired men braced themselves for the effort to pitch camp. Peter and the sergeant took control and soon a big fire burned behind a wall of branches. Against the wall twigs and thin branches were packed for beds. Where the bushman can find fuel and material for building he does not bother about the frost, and in winter the Royal North-West patrols sleep by their camp-fires far out on the snowy wilds.

A trooper fried pork and doughy bannocks, Deering brewed a kettle of strong tea, and when all had eaten like famished animals the men, for the most part, went to sleep. For a time, however, Deering, the sergeant, and Jimmy sat by the fire and smoked.

On the mountains, they were absorbed by the stern physical effort, and concentrated mechanically on getting down. Animal instinct urged them forward, but now the risk of freezing was gone, they began to think like men. The sergeant and Jimmy were puzzled and imagined they might get some light from Deering. Jimmy's brows were knit and when he looked about he frowned. Although

he was warm and the hot tea had revived him, he felt his brain was dull.

Sparks leaped up from the fire; smoke tossed about the camp. One heard the wind in the pine-tops and the trunks reflected gleams of flickering light. The mist had blown away, and Jimmy saw far off a dim white ridge cut the sky. Then he turned his head and shivered, for he knew Stannard's broken body was somewhere in the rocks and perhaps nobody would find the spot. Stannard was his friend, a cultivated gentleman and a famous mountaineer; but he had slipped and gone down the precipice like a raw tourist. Moreover, although it looked as if he had killed the game warden, he had said nothing. In fact, it seemed as if he were willing for Jimmy to pay. Yet Jimmy was not persuaded; for Stannard to use treachery like that was unthinkable.

"You're satisfied I'm not accountable for the shooting accident?" he said to the sergeant.

"I guess my chiefs are satisfied. Our orders were to leave you alone."

For a few moments Jimmy was quiet. He had carried a heavy load and now the load was gone. He could urge Margaret to marry him and get on with his ranching. Perhaps, if she agreed, he might go back to Lancashire, but he must not yet dwell on this.

"When did your officers find out I had nothing to do with it?" he resumed.

"Not long since; the day before warden Douglas died. All the time he was at the hospital we waited for his statement, but got nothing. Although I've

seen men shot, Douglas puzzled me and I reckon he puzzled the doctors. Sometimes he was sensible, but he didn't talk, and when we asked him about the shooting he looked at us as if he'd plumb forgot. Then, one day, it all came back and he gave us his story."

"The night was dark and Douglas could not see much," Deering remarked. "I expect you had something to go on that helped you fill out his statement."

The sergeant smiled. "The trooper who measured up the distances and made a plan of the clearing was a surveyor's clerk. Then Douglas was shot in the centre of his chest, but the mark at the back was to one side. Besides, we had got Mr. Leyland's hired man; Miss Jardine put us on his track. He sure doesn't like Mr. Leyland but his tale was useful."

"In fact, if Mr. Leyland had not pulled out, you would not have bothered him?"

"I expect that is so. When Stannard sent Mr. Leyland off, he reckoned to give us a useful clue. Our duty was to try the clue."

Jimmy looked up sharply, but Deering said, "Stannard's plan was good, but your officers are not fools. Then another thing is obvious; if you had tried very hard, you might have hit Mr. Leyland's trail before."

"It's possible," the sergeant agreed with a touch of dryness. "Maybe the bosses were after Stannard. But I don't get it all yet. Stannard was not a fool. I guess he knew we couldn't put it on him that he meant to shoot Douglas. Since

he was using the pit-light, he'd have gone to the pen, but I guess he could have stood for all he got. Yet when he saw he was corraled, he stepped back, off the rocks!"

"Stannard was an English highbrow. A year or two in a penitentiary would have knocked him out. Perhaps this accounts for it."

"Oh, well," said the sergeant, "I guess we'll let it go. For three nights I've shivered on the rocks and I want to sleep."

He lay down on the branches and Jimmy waited. The smoke was gone, the fire was clear, and red reflections played about the quiet figures at the bottom of the rude wall. After a time Jimmy thought all slept and he turned to Deering.

"I don't know if the sergeant was satisfied, but I am not. You imply that when Stannard stepped back he knew where he went?"

Deering pondered. He saw Jimmy was disturbed and puzzled, but he doubted if there was much use in enlightening him. Stannard was gone. Jimmy had trusted the fellow and had already got a nasty knock. Yet if he had begun to see a light, Deering did not mean to cheat him. He was not Stannard's champion.

"Well," he said, "it certainly looks like that."

"But why? The sergeant thinks they would not have tried Stannard for shooting with intent to kill; he declares Stannard could have stood for all he got."

"I expect that is so. Sometimes, however, people are not logical. For example, when you thought you had shot Douglas, you pulled out."

"I ought to have stopped. Now I think about it, Stannard rather persuaded me to go," Jimmy agreed and looked at Deering hard. "When you recently found out Stannard had gone to my help, why did you go after him?"

"For one thing, I knew he had not got a proper guide. I thought the job a man's job, and Stevens and Dillon are boys."

"Somehow I feel that's not all," said Jimmy and for a moment or two was very quiet. Then he resumed: "When Stannard and I were on the ledge you were at the corner. I was going to jump on the slab, but you shouted."

"Sometimes you're rash. When you jump on a rock, you want to know the rock is sound."

"The slab was not sound," said Jimmy in a hoarse voice. "Still I was on the rope and Stannard knew, if I went down, I might pull him off the ledge——"

He stopped and Deering saw he did not want to solve the puzzle. "It's done with and you're a stanch friend," he resumed. "Well, I'm very tired."

Deering gave him a sympathetic nod, and pulling his blanket round him, got down on a pile of twigs. Jimmy stopped with his back against a log and looked into the gloom behind the black pine-tops. High up on the lonely rocks a rotten slab dropped to the gully, and, but for Deering's stanchness, he might have taken an awful plunge. In the meantime, the cold was keen, his body was exhausted and his brain was dull. He did not know much and did not want to know all. The thing was done

with and he resolved to let it go. By and by he got down on the twigs by Deering, stretched his legs to the fire and went to sleep.

In the morning after breakfast the sergeant lighted his pipe and stopped the troopers, who had begun to roll up their packs.

"We won't break camp yet, boys," he said and turned to Deering. "Mr. Stevens can't stand for a long hike and my orders were to bring Stannard back."

"Sometimes the police orders do not go," said Deering drily. "Until the snow melts nobody will bring Stannard back. He has cheated you."

"I've got to try and want your help."

"You can reckon on mine," said Dillon and looked at Jimmy. "Laura must be satisfied——"

"That is so; I'm going to stop," said Jimmy, and when Deering agreed, the sergeant ordered a trooper and Gillane to start for the railroad.

He stated he must send a report, and Jimmy and Dillon gave the packer some telegrams. The men set off and soon afterwards the others, leaving Stevens to watch the fire, began to climb the long steep ridge behind the camp.

The effort cost them much. All were slack and tired and knew their labour would not be rewarded. Yet for some hours they struggled across the snow-fields and searched the rocks with the glasses. In the afternoon they went back, and lying about the fire, talked and smoked.

At daybreak they started again and reached higher ground. The day was bright and the rocks and gullies were distinct, but when the sun sank

behind the range, they had found nothing. All the same, Jimmy saw that when Stannard resolved to try the gully his judgment was strangely good. There was not another line down the rocks and nowhere but at the bottom could the party have reached a slope leading to the trees. At length Deering gave the sergeant his glasses.

"Nothing's on the big gravel bank and we can't get up the cliff," he said. "I have had enough and I expect you are satisfied. Maybe you'll find Stannard after the thaw, but when he stepped off the rocks I think he went for good."

"I've tried," said the sergeant. "Let's get down. At sun-up we'll pull out for the railroad."

They went back, but after supper nobody talked much. Somehow the camp was gloomy and Jimmy fought against a vague sense of horror. To know they would take the trail in the morning was some relief.

At daybreak they broke camp and started downhill. All were glad to go, but when they reached the valley Jimmy stopped and looked up at the distant white streak in the rocks. Now he was on level ground, to picture his crawling down the awful gully was hard, and at the top was the snow-bank where Stannard vanished.

Jimmy shivered, but after a few moments turned and ran to join the others. He was young, the sun was on the mountains and the doubts and horror he had known melted like the dark. The thing was done with, the load he had carried was gone, and he was free.

Perhaps it was strange, but he began to perceive

that the freedom he thought he enjoyed with Stannard was an illusion. Stannard's light touch was very firm and he had led Jimmy where he did not mean to go. Laura, not knowing all she did, had helped him to resist, and when he knew Margaret, Stannard's control was broken. It looked as if Stannard had not meant to let him go; but Jimmy refused to speculate about the other's plans.

At length, so to speak, he was his own man. He had paid for his extravagance and extravagance had lost its charm. Now he knew no obstacle to his marrying Margaret, and if she were willing, he resolved to resume his proper job at the cotton mill. When he thought about it his heart beat, but Margaret was not yet persuaded, and unless she knew his relations approved, to persuade her might be hard. Well, Sir James was at Vancouver; in fact, he was perhaps at the hotel, and Jimmy was keen to meet him.

Progress, however, was slow. Broken trees and rocks from the mountain blocked the way, fresh snow had fallen, and Stevens was lame. He had slept with his wet boots on and his foot was frostbitten. Then Dillon was slack and moody. His fatigue was not gone, and if Gillane had sent the telegrams, when the party reached the settlement Laura would be waiting. Dillon shrank from enlightening her and Jimmy sympathized.

XXXIII

SIR JAMES APPROVES

THE sun was low but the light was good, and Jimmy's party, crossing a hillside, saw a long plume of smoke, The smoke moved and when it melted the rumble of a distant freight train rolled up the valley. After a time, they saw telegraph posts, a break in the rocks, and two or three small houses. Then their fatigue vanished and all went fast, but Jimmy was sorry for Dillon, whose mouth was tight. Jimmy thought Laura waited at the railroad and Frank must tell her Stannard would not come back. Moreover, she must soon know Stannard had shot the game warden and was willing for Jimmy to pay. When they reached the bottom of the hill he stopped Dillon.

"I expect Laura has got a cruel knock, but perhaps we can save her some extra pain. If you take the line you think will hurt her least, I'll play up, and you can trust Deering."

Dillon said nothing, but gave Jimmy a grateful look. Half an hour afterwards they pushed through a belt of trees and saw a party waiting by the railroad. It was obvious the telegrams had arrived. Although the people were some distance

off, Jimmy picked out Margaret, who stood by a man he did not think was Jardine; the bush ranchers did not wear furs like his. By and by he distinguished Mrs. Dillon and Mrs. Jardine, Grahame, the section hand, and a police trooper, but they were not important and he speculated about the stranger, until, when the track was not far off, he saw a light. Margaret's companion was Sir James Leyland.

Jimmy frowned. His uncle's arrival was awkward, for he had rather hoped to work on Margaret's emotion and carry her away. In fact, he had wondered whether to take her boldly in his arms might not be a useful plan. Now the plan would not work; although when he stopped in front of Margaret he saw she was moved. The blood came to her skin and her glance was very kind. She wore an old fur cap and a soft deerskin jacket; in fact, her clothes were a rancher's daughter's clothes, but somehow she was marked by a touch of dignity. She gave Jimmy her hand and he turned to his uncle.

"You know Miss Jardine, sir?"

"It looks like that," Sir James replied with a smile. "Since you are my nephew, I felt I ought to know your friends. Then Miss Jardine was kind, and seeing my curiosity, helped to throw some light upon your romantic adventures."

Jimmy gave Margaret a grateful look and laughed. "I expect you were puzzled, sir?"

"To some extent, I was puzzled," Sir James agreed. "I'm a sober and perhaps old-fashioned business man. The golden days when I was young

and rash are gone, but one recaptures a reflection of their vanished charm."

"Ah," said Jimmy, "I knew you were human! No days were golden for Uncle Dick. I expect you know we jarred?"

"Dick indicated something like that, but he has a number of useful qualities. Perhaps they're inherited qualities, because I think one or two are yours. For example, I went to see your ranch. You have made good progress, on sound business lines, although chopping trees is obviously a strenuous job."

"Do you know much about ranching?" Jimmy inquired.

"I do not. Miss Jardine thought I ought to see the ranch and her father enlightened me."

Margaret blushed and Sir James smiled. "Friends are useful, Jimmy, so long as one's friends are good; but we mustn't philosophize. They are cooking some food for you at the post office and the station agent has engaged to stop the Vancouver express. He expects the train will arrive before very long."

They went to the post office and soon afterwards the train rolled down the gorge. Jimmy helped Margaret up the steps, gave Peter his awkward thanks, and jumped on board. By and by the cars sped past a small stone hut and he wondered whether he was the man who had not long since stolen down at night to meet the section hand.

When they reached the hotel the guests Jimmy had known were gone, and a lonely stranger occupied a room. The clerk stated they would shut down

for the winter as soon as the party went, but dinner would be served as usual in the big dining-room.

Jimmy, refreshed by a hot bath, dressed with luxurious satisfaction. To wear clean, dry clothes and know others would cook his food was something new. When he went downstairs Sir James was in the rotunda.

"Now you are the fashionable young fellow I expected to meet," he remarked with a twinkle. "You see, Dick drew your portrait."

"Oh, well," said Jimmy, "I expect I bothered Dick and perhaps he was a better friend than I thought. All the same, I hope to persuade you the portrait was something of a caricature."

Sir James gave him a thoughtful glance. "It is possible. When you came down the hill at Green River, carrying your heavy pack, your mouth tight and your eyes fixed, I knew my nephew. Sometimes when the cheap mill engine stopped and your father put down his pen and took off his coat he looked like that. Well, it's long since and I have got a title I did not particularly want; but after all we are new arrivals and the primitive vein is not yet run out——" He stopped and resumed: "Mrs. Dillon is in the drawing-room, but we must wait for Miss Jardine. She and her father are my guests."

"You are kind, but I thought them my guests, sir!"

Sir James smiled. "You are rather dull, Jimmy. After all, I am the head of your house."

They went to the dining-room and at the door Jimmy stopped. Margaret and Jardine crossed

the belt of polished wood between the pillars, but now Margaret was not dressed like a bush girl. The deerskin jacket was gone, her clothes were fashionable and her skin shone against the fine dark-coloured material. Yet she was marked by the grace and balance one gets in the woods, and Jimmy thought her step like a mountain deer's. Then he saw his uncle studied him and he crossed the floor.

Mrs. Dillon, Frank and Deering came in, but although Sir James was an urbane host sometimes the talk got slack. Laura had not come down and another occupied Stannard's chair.

The stranger Jimmy had remarked dined alone some distance off, but when Mrs. Dillon got up he joined the group.

"You agreed to give me an interview," he said to Sir James.

"That is so," Sir James replied. "You wanted to see my nephew, I think, and since we may talk about Stannard, I would like Mr. Deering to join us."

They went to the rotunda and the stranger pulled out some documents. He was old and rather fat, but his clothes were fastidiously neat and his glance was keen.

"You know I'm Mayson, and my London address is on my card," he said. "The card does not state my occupation, but I lend money."

"I imagined something like that," said Sir James. "Stannard was your partner?"

"He was my agent. Stannard belonged to exclusive sporting clubs I could not join; but perhaps

this is not important. I understand you are satisfied he is dead ? "

Deering nodded. " Nothing made of flesh and blood could stand for his plunge down the rocks."

" Since he was a famous mountaineer, I expect you thought his carelessness strange."

" I have some grounds to think you could account for it," said Deering drily.

" We will talk about this again," said Mayson and turned to Sir James. " Mr. Leyland owes me a large sum ; I have brought his notes."

Sir James studied the documents and gave them to Jimmy, who admitted the account was accurate.

" Very well," said Sir James. " My nephew meets his bills. The interest is high, but he must pay for his extravagance. Before I write you a cheque, I want to see your agreement with Stannard and would like some particulars about your partnership."

Mayson gave him a document, and when Jimmy stated that he knew Stannard's hand, resumed : " Stannard joined me some years since, at a time when he was awkwardly embarrassed. The combine had advantages. Stannard had qualities I had not ; his friends were fashionable sporting people. For all that, he was bankrupt and I supplied him with money."

" Exactly," said Sir James. " Still, perhaps Stannard's agreeing to tout for you was strange. My nephew thought him a fastidious gentleman. There's another thing ; since he was willing to exploit his friends, did you not imagine he might cheat you ? "

Mayson smiled. "Stannard durst not cheat me, and perhaps I can give Mr. Deering the light he wants. I knew something about Stannard that, had others known, would have broken him. When we made our agreement, he declared the person he had injured was recently dead and the risk he ran was gone. Perhaps he was sincere, but sometimes I doubt. Not long since, when he began to keep back sums I ought to have got, I made inquiries and found out that another knew. In fact, it looked as if Stannard were buying the fellow's silence with my money. Had he been frank, I might have broken the extortioner, but he was not frank. I think he knew he had deceived me about the agreement and was afraid. Anyhow, he tried to meet the demands, until——"

"I think I see," said Deering. "You do not yet know all Stannard's plans and now they're not important. I expect we can take it for granted that he imagined the demands could not long be met. Then he saw the police had found out his part in the shooting accident and he went down the rocks."

"It looks like that," Mayson agreed.

Deering turned to Jimmy. Jimmy's look was stern and his brows were knit. Deering thought he saw a light, but he said nothing and Sir James got up.

"If you will go with me to the office, Mr. Mayson, I will write you a cheque."

They went off and soon afterwards Dillon joined Jimmy.

"Laura wants to see you," he said in a disturbed

voice. "She knows Stannard shot Douglas, and it's now obvious he meant you to pay; but I rather think that's not all. She talks about her not being justified in marrying me. The thing's ridiculous; if Stannard was a crook, she's not accountable, but my arguments don't carry much weight. Perhaps you can help. You engaged to play up."

"I'll try," said Jimmy and went to the drawing-room.

Nobody but Laura was about and her forlorn look moved him. Her face was pinched and all her colour was gone, but she gave Jimmy a level glance.

"You know I'm sorry," he said and taking her cold hand, resumed with some embarrassment: "Frank's my friend and you were very kind. Not long since I thought——"

"You thought you were my lover?" said Laura in a quiet voice. "You were lucky because you were not, but had you agreed to go back to the cotton mill, I might have married you. Now you know my shabbiness."

"I know nothing like that," Jimmy declared. "I do, however, know I owe you much. You were the first to warn me where my extravagance led. Now I want to help——"

"Ah," said Laura, "you are generous! I was willing to cheat you and it's plain my father was not your friend."

Jimmy studied her and thought her afraid. In fact, he began to see why she had sent for him. Laura was keen; she knew something, but he

imagined she did not know all. Anyhow, he was not going to enlighten her.

"You mustn't exaggerate the importance of the shooting accident," he said. "I and Mr. Stannard used our rifles. The night was dark and I imagined I had hit the warden. I expect Mr. Stannard had no grounds to think the unlucky shot was his. Until recently, the police believed the shot was mine."

Laura was quiet for a few moments, and then with an effort looked up.

"My father knew the rocks; he was a famous mountaineer. Yet when the police sergeant ordered him to stop he went down the bank——"

"After all, his carelessness was not very strange," Jimmy replied. "Mr. Stannard was leader and had borne a heavy strain; in fact, we were all exhausted and our nerve was gone. Then the police came out of the mist, the sergeant shouted, and Mr. Stannard knew they claimed he had shot the warden. He was startled and, so to speak, mechanically stepped back——"

He stopped, for although his object was good, he knew Laura's cleverness. He did not know if he had altogether banished her doubts, but she gave him a grateful look.

"Frank is your friend," she said in a quiet voice. "He wants me to marry him. Are you satisfied I ought not to refuse?"

"Why, of course I'm satisfied," Jimmy declared. "You had nothing to do with the shooting accident; you were my friend before Frank was. I hope we're friends for good. To refuse to marry Frank

is ridiculous. Since I'm persuaded, you ought not to doubt."

Laura gave him her hand.

"You are stanch, Jimmy, but I'm tired," she said, and let him go.

In the hall Jimmy met Sir James, who said, "I am going for a quiet smoke. Will you join me?"

"Not for a time, sir. Since I arrived I've been strenuously occupied doing things I ought. Now I'm going to do something I want to do."

"For example?" Sir James inquired.

"I'm going to talk to Margaret. I hope to persuade her to marry me."

"When I suggested our taking a smoke, my object was to inquire about your friendship for Miss Jardine. After all, I am your trustee."

"I hope you approve my plan, sir," Jimmy rejoined.

"You know where to stop," Sir James remarked with a twinkle. "Perhaps my approval carries more weight than you think; because had I not approved, Miss Jardine would not have agreed."

"Then you have talked to her about it?" said Jimmy with keen surprise.

"Not at all; Miss Jardine is not dull. I soon saw she understood my importance, but did not mean to use her charm. Her friendliness was marked by some reserve. In fact, it was plain she acknowledged my business was to judge if she were the girl for you and she would not persuade me. Well, I liked her pride, and although we did not talk about it, I rather think she knew I did approve."

"Thank you, sir," said Jimmy with a grateful look.

Sir James put his hand on Jimmy's arm.

"When I started from Bombay I was bothered about you. Dick had found out something about Stannard and imagined Miss Stannard was his accomplice."

"Miss Stannard didn't know Stannard's occupation. She is not accountable for her father."

"That is so," Sir James agreed. "I think Miss Stannard a charming girl, but she was not the girl for you. Leylands are manufacturers and your job is to control a big industry; Miss Stannard's is to cultivate her social talents and amuse herself. Margaret Jardine, however, is our sort. She's stanch and sincere; you know her pluck and all she risked for you. You want a wife like that, and I wish you luck!"

Jimmy found Margaret in the drawing-room. Mrs. Dillon had gone off with Laura, and Jimmy advanced resolutely.

"At Green Lake I asked you to marry me and you refused. Yet you knew I loved you and perhaps I had some grounds to think——"

The blood came to Margaret's skin. "I did know, Jimmy; but to marry you because I stopped the trooper was another thing."

"Now you're ridiculous! All the same, in some respects your refusal was justified. My drawbacks were plain. For all you knew, I was an extravagant wastrel, and the police were on my track. Since I mustn't urge you, I was forced to be resigned."

"Sometimes you are rather dull," Margaret remarked and smiled.

"Well, I'm not forced to try for resignation now. I was something of an extravagant fool, but the police will leave me alone."

"The police were not the obstacle," said Margaret in a quiet voice.

Jimmy laughed. "It looks like that; the trooper who tried to catch us did not bother you long. If Sir James was the obstacle, he's, so to speak, removed. You have conquered him and he declared a few minutes since you were the girl for me. He's a kind old fellow. Don't you think you ought to indulge him?"

He reached down and took her hands. "I want you, Margaret. My extravagance is done with. I'm going back to undertake my proper job and I need your help."

"Then I must try to help," said Margaret, and Jimmy took her in his arms.

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